A HISTORY OF THE HALF-WAY COVENANT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Half-Way Covenant was a system or set of principles formulated by the New England Puritans for the purpose of providing an orderly means of admission to an officially recognized, but limited, membership in a Congregational church. It was designed to solve a fundamental problem which developed in their church system. This was the problem of what to do about their offspring who grew to maturity but failed to pass through a religious experience which they considered a necessary sign that the individual had been supernaturally regenerated and was fit for the privileges of full communion in the church. These privileges included the right to vote in church affairs, to partake of the Lord's Supper and to have their children baptized by the church. The problem became acute when the children of the first generation Puritans had children of their own and sought baptism for them but could not meet the rigid standards for full church membership. By providing a means of limited membership for such persons it was thought that their children could be baptized lawfully as children of church members. The problem was particularly perplexing because the Puritans firmly believed the teachings of their Covenant theology which promised an assured continuity of the covenant relation from one generation to the next without break unless there was an overt action on the part of the individual which broke the covenant relation. But when there was no such overt action and no expected conversion experience the parents were puzzled and frustrated.

The term Half-Way Covenant is actually a nickname given to it by its opponents in derision.[1] The term was coined from the fact that candidates for limited church membership had to own a covenant which gave them recognized status as church members with the benefits of the church's watch-care and ministry and baptism for their children, but did not give them the right to vote in church affairs or to partake of the Lord's Supper. It was thus a covenant which gave them only a limited or half-way membership, hence the nickname. The name became the symbol for the entire system although those who practiced it carefully avoided the use of the term. The term has been used throughout this study because it is such a meaningful and descriptive one, and it has been used herein to describe principles that predate the actual coinage of the term.

New England Puritanism represents the high point in the attempted fusion of the ideal of the pure church with the theories of Covenant theology and the principle of the church covenant as a constituting device. It should be kept in mind that church covenants and Covenant theology are not necessarily related. Some churches are Covenant in their theology but do not use a church covenant, and others, such as the Baptists, may use a church covenant but are definitely not Covenant in their theology. Church covenants are a device of church polity used for the purpose of organizing a local church; whereas Covenant theology, in its modern form, is a theological system in which the organizing principle is an adherence to hypothetical covenants that are supposed to have been made within the economy of the Trinity for the purposes of administering the covenant of grace. Early New England Congregational ministers were unquestionably Covenant theologians, but their main emphasis was placed on the practical application of the promises given in the Bible concerning the blessings to be given to the faithful and the continuity of the covenant promises by lineal descent to their children.

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[1] Perry Miller says that "the Synod's [1662] proposal was quickly dubbed-as it still is known to fame and infamy-the 'Half-Way Covenant,'" in The New England Mind from Colony to Province (Boston, 1953), p. 95 Formal usage of the term appears to come much later. One of the first publications to bear the title appears to have been Joseph Bellamy's The Half-Way Covenant: A Dialogue (1769).

Covenant theology and the church covenant idea could be fused without any difficulty, but when the American Puritans sought to impose their ideal of a pure church on the covenant system and developed a strict test for church membership in order to guarantee that purity, an inherently contradictory element was introduced. They, however, at the time did not anticipate any such contradictory element because they fully expected their children to follow in their footsteps according to the promises as they interpreted them. This insoluble compound was destined to produce friction and controversies in the churches from about 1634 to 1834. The year 1834 seems to mark the last date on which churches took formal action to abandon the Half-Way Covenant, and thus, in effect, admitting that they were abandoning the ideal of the pure church which it had been set up to safeguard. The Half-Way Covenant represents the high point in the efforts to solve the problem, and it is the purpose of this study to trace both the historical development of the ideas and developments which produced the Half-Way Covenant and those which led to its decline and abandonment. In the process an effort will be made to show the relationship of the Half-Way Covenant to a large segment of New England religious and political history.

Numerous studies of various phases of the Half-Way Covenant history have been made, but none of them have attempted to present the entire span of the problem with its roots in the Ancient world and its consummation in nineteenth century America. The basic work for a study of the Half-Way Covenant history is Williston Walker's _Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism_ (Boston, 1960). This work gives a good survey of the history of the Half-Way Covenant, presents an extensive bibliography of the pertinent literature and contains the text of the basic documents involved. Among the many works that give considerable treatment to the Half-Way Covenant or closely related problems, the following can be mentioned as particularly valuable: Henry Martin Dexter, _The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature_ (New York, 1890) is important for its listing of the literature involved; Champlin Burrage, _The Church Covenant Idea Its Origin and Its Development_ (Philadelphia, 1904); various works by Perry Miller including his "Half-Way Covenant," _New England Quarterly_, VI (1933), 676-715, "Marrow of Puritan Divinity," _Transactions of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts_, XXXII (1933-1937), 247-300, _The New England Mind from Colony to Province_ (Boston, 1953); Peter Y. De Jong, _The Covenant Idea in New England Theology 1620-1847_ (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1945), is especially important for the later phases of the controversy; William W. McKee, "The Idea of Covenant _in Early English Puritanism_

(1580-1643)," (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Yale, 1948); Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," Church History, XX (March, 1951), 37-57. Cotton Mather's Magnalia and William Hubbard's General History of New England are indispensible as are the records of the various colonies and churches.

The literature of the Half-Way Covenant controversy is very voluminous. Perry Miller has studied and discussed the literary efforts of early New England Puritans and concluded that after the first generation the writers were largely limited in their consideration to a denouncement of sins. He suggested that "if they write upon anything else, it must be about the halfway covenant and its manifold consequences-a development wholly in this country-or else upon their wars with the Indians."[2] This statement seems to be an exaggeration, but it does tend to show the important rôle which the Half-Way Covenant played in the lives of many New Englanders. It is difficult for us today, perhaps, to appreciate the relative importance of the Half-Way Covenant controversy in New England life because of the different orientation of our society. The church-oriented society of early New England made the Half-Way Covenant and related subjects much more vital to the lives and thinking of their generations than we of the present pluralistic society can imagine.

The New England Puritans were pre-eminently Biblicists. Above all they sought to do that which the Bible prescribed. This was their controlling principle of life and faith. They sought the purity of the church because they believed that the Bible demanded it. They insisted on a credible conversion experience because they believed that the Bible demanded it. They believed in the principle of covenant continuity because they believed that the Bible promised it. If these deeply ingrained principles are kept in mind it helps to understand the intensity of feeling that is manifested in so much of their theological discussion.

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[2] Perry Miller, Errand Into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956), p. 10.

Considerable emphasis has been placed in this study on the practical aspects of the problem and the actual workings of the Half-Way Covenant system. For this reason heavy reliance has been placed on the church records[3] and citations from them. In quoting from the church records and other source materials the spelling, capitalization and abbreviations of the original have been changed in many cases to conform with modern usage and understanding unless there was some question about the meaning or intent of emphasis. The original punctuation has been retained for the most part.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Congregationalism, jealously guarded and for many years vigorously defended against all encroachments, was the principle of the autonomy of the local church. Because of this principle considerable variations of practice within the over-all unity are very evident. This is as true of the terms of church admission and admission to baptism as it is of many other practices. A general pattern is to be seen, but at the same time many minor variations were practiced according to the desires of the particular church and its pastor. A statement of evidence concerning what was done in one church may be valid only for that particular church or perhaps a limited geographic area. With this as a qualifying guide certain practices and modifications can be set forth as indicative of trends and general practice. Often we have only one or two statements relative to a certain practice which may have had only a limited area of incidence. In similar fashion practices often varied from time to time in a given church as pastors changed, new people came into the congregation and general points of approach and emphasis changed. That these variations often tended to produce discord and controversy is clearly shown by the church records of the period.

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[3] For an annotated inventory of extant Massachusetts Congregational church records see a forthcoming Harvard University doctoral dissertation on this subject by Mr. Harold Worthly. I have consulted with Mr. Worthly and have received very valuable suggestions as to the location and usefulness of the Massachusetts church records. The Colonial Dames Society has deposited in the library of the Connecticut Historical Society at Hartford transcriptions and photostatic copies of the records of approximately 280 Connecticut Congregational churches.

In this study considerable emphasis has been placed on the background of the covenant idea and on the practices and problems leading up to the actual Half-Way Covenant formulation and ratification. The reason for these inclusions has been to show the theological and emotional climate in which the institution developed.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF COVENANT THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH COVENANT IDEA

The Covenant theology and the church covenant idea which were so firmly fused by New England Puritanism were the product of a long and rather erratic development. Numerous studies of various phases of the development have been made, but nearly all of them have tended to overlook the contributions of William Tyndale and the Marian exiles at Frankfort on the Main. This discussion will attempt to show the contributions of these men as well as others to the development of ideas which reached their zenith in the theology and church polity of New England Puritanism.

In evaluating the contributions to the covenant ideas it should be kept in mind that this New England Puritanism, or Congregationalism as it was early styled, was a fusion of lines of covenant thinking that are not necessarily closely related. One line involves the theological principle of a covenantal relationship between the individual and his God which is established by a contract-covenant transaction. In the case of the Covenant theology of the Reformed churches there is an additional line of thinking which includes a tenet of assured continuity in the covenant relationship from generation to generation. In contrast to this the Anabaptist groups stressed the covenantal relationship but denied the theory of continuity. Another line of thinking which was incorporated into New England church polity was the principle of association for mutual benefit and advancement of the common interest. This primarily involved the enhancement of the relationship established by virtue of the theological covenant, and the device of the church covenant was the means by which this was accomplished. In this respect it served as the means of the self-constituting of an independent, self-governing ecclesiastical group within the framework of the civil community. Lastly there is the principle of permanent membership and allegiance once the covenantal relationship had been established. Many of the examples cited in the following discussion will be found to contribute only in one or two areas, and a few will be found that do seem to approximate the complete model.

The concept of association involved in such terms as league, confederation, union, contract, covenant is a fundamental one and permeates human relationships; likewise the same concept is found throughout the history of human belief relative to relationships between man and Deity. It has been shown[1] that some idea of covenant relationship between God and man was held by virtually all peoples long before its development among the Hebrews; however it is in connection with the Hebrew religion that the covenant idea has most relevance to the development of the church covenant and Covenant theology.

The Old Testament of the Hebrews records many instances of covenant making. There are covenants between God and individuals such as Noah, Abraham and David, between God and the nation as is seen in the great Mosaic or national covenant made at Mount Sinai, between God, the king and the people, and there is also the promise of a new covenant. All in all there are approximately 276 occurrences of the basic Hebrew word for covenant in the Old

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[1] H. Clay Trumbull's two books, The Blood Covenant a Primitive Rite and Its Bearings on Scripture, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1893) and The Threshold Covenant or the Beginning of Religious Rites, 2nd ed. (New York, 1906), show this in detail.

Testament.

The covenant made by God with Abraham in the twelfth, fifteenth and seventeenth chapters of the book of Genesis is the one most frequently appealed to in subsequent theological discussion, and it appears to be the basic covenant in Covenant theology. It is actually more in the nature of a promise on God's part than an actual covenant as normally regarded.

One of the clearest examples of Biblical covenant making is seen in Exodus 24:1-8 in connection with the solemnization of the Mosaic covenant. According to the account Moses told the people the terms which God was offering unto them, and these terms included both promise of blessing for obedience and promise of judgment for disobedience. The people of Israel agreed to accept the conditions, and Moses wrote out the terms of the covenant. The transaction was then sealed by a sacrificial offering in which one-half of the blood of the victims was sprinkled upon the altar which represented the Godward aspect of the covenant, and the other one-half of the blood was sprinkled upon the people to seal their part of the contract. This was both a religious and civil contract because its terms included the whole civil structure of the Jewish theocracy as well as its religious provisions.

The New Testament does not seem to give any clear examples of the principle of covenant making[2] aside from that given by Christ in the institution of what is variously called the Eucharist, Holy Communion or the Lord's

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[2] This is the conclusion of Champlin Burrage in his The Church Covenant Idea its Origin and its Development (Philadelphia, 1904), p. x.

Supper. In establishing this sacrament Christ refers to the cup as "the New Covenant in my blood,"[3] and this seems to imply the creation of a new covenant.

Church history seems to offer only a few examples of the explicit use of the church covenant principle prior to the time of the Protestant Reformation; however germs of the idea may be seen in various places. One example is that of the oath which Pliny[4] records as characteristic of the Christians with whom he has had contact. He reports that they bind themselves with an oath not to do any wicked deeds. Another case which is claimed by Cotton Mather[5] to be an example of a virtual church covenant is the description given by Justin Martyr of the formation of their church. He says that it is composed of "those who are convinced and believe what we say and teach is the truth and pledge themselves to live accordingly."[6]

The numerous Roman clubs and funerary gilds can be cited as examples from which later ideas may have come. Precedents for the idea of a contractual church relationship can be seen in the Feudal contract of vassalage and the many medieval gilds with their oath of fealty to the brotherhood as a requirement for membership.

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[3] 1 Corinthians 11:24. The Bible and Holy Scriptures (Geneva, 1560).

[4] Letters, 10: 96.

[5] Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov-Anglorum . . . (Boston: 1726), p. 12.

[6] First Apology, 61.

It seems reasonable to suggest that almost all independent and some of the semi-independent religious congregations would have had at least an implicit covenant in order to function as an identifiable entity. In this case the Apostolic and Sub-Apostolic churches could be cited as examples, and this principle would have continued until the development of hierarchial control. In the era preceding the Reformation such groups as the Albigenses, Hussites, Bohemian Brethren, Waldenses, Lollards and various other sects could be considered as in some manner supplying precedents for the church covenant idea. One study[7] has detected the presence of Christian congregations in the Netherlands which were completely independent of the Roman church as early as 1420. These may have owed their origin in part to the Chambers of Rhetoric[8] of the Low Countries which apparently served as forums of dissent against the Roman church for many years prior to Luther's revolt.

In England there are a number of avenues of development of Independency which existed over a long period of time. Some of the congregations of the White Canons[9] appear to have been completely independent of external control and organizing stimulus. John Wyclif and the Lollard influence must be reckoned as a continuing force working for the self-constituting principle also.

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[7] Leonard Verduin, "Menno Simon's Theology Reviewed," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (January, 1950), 57.

[8] Leonard Verduin, "The Chambers of Rhetoric and Anabaptist Origins in the Low Countries," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXIV (July, 1960), 192-196.

[9] See H. M. Colvin, The White Canons in England (Oxford, 1951), pp. 11-15.

The oldest covenant approach appears to be basically theological as seen in the pre-Hebraic developments. With the Hebrews there is both a theological and a governmental aspect of the covenant. The New Testament stresses the theological aspect of the covenantal principle. In the early church age the covenant idea as seen in oaths and pledges is basically one of polity. This is followed by a theological connotation in the Roman church on the one hand and on the other hand a basically political concept as seen in the implied covenantal relationship within the various independent religious groups that arose in the late Medieval scene.

The concept of a convenantal relationship between God and man appears early and fairly frequently among the Reformers. This might be expected because of its prominence in the Scriptures coupled with their own stress on Biblical exegesis and high regard for the authority of the Scriptures. Much foundational work was done by the Reformers, but the subject of covenant did not receive its full development and systematization until the seventeenth century.

Luther was well aware of the principle of covenantal relationship between God and man and numerous references to this can be found in his writings. He recognized the importance of the covenant between God and Abraham but confessed his own lack of time to develop the implications.[10]

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[10] See Luther's comments in his Lectures on Genesis Chapters 15-20. Vol 3 in Luther's Works, Jaroslav Pelikan, editor (St. Louis, 1960), pp. 41-116.

The Reformers frequently refer to baptism as involving the covenant between God and the one baptized. This is true of Erasmus in the Catholic fold and of Melanchthon in the Lutheran. Melanchthon also developed the natural law aspect of the covenant.

It is perhaps worthy of note that Luther seems to place something of the same emphasis on regarding the promises of God as covenants that is found in Tyndale's marginal notes, and it is possible, although it cannot be proved, that there may have been some exchange of ideas between Tyndale and the Wittenburg theologians.[11]

Tyndale's English New Testament was first translated in 1525 and reached England in 1526. His influence on Puritanism in general and Congregationalism in particular can hardly be questioned. His writings and translations of the Scriptures plus the fact that he was martyred for this work would have tended to endear him to those of Puritan pursuasion. His works were extensively printed and had a wide circulation in England and Scotland.[12] The strong recommendation given Tyndale's writings by John Fox in his edition of The Works of Tindale, Frith, and Barnes, printed at London in 1573, seems to be indicative of their esteem among the Puritans. In his Preface Fox says "In opening the Scriptures, what truth, what soundness can a man require more, or what more is to be said, than is to be found in Tindal?"

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[11] J. F. Mozley, William Tyndale (London, 1937), pp. 51-54, has presented evidence to show that Tyndale was in Wittenburg for nine or ten months at the time he was translating his New Testament.

[12] R. Mercer Wilson, editor, Tyndale Commemoration Volume (London, 1939), pp. 224-240, has shown something of their circulation and effect.

Of particular significance in the development of Congregationalism was Tyndale's insistence on translating the Greek words ecclesia as "Congregation" rather than "Church" and presbyter as "elder" rather than "priest." In his Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue Tyndale says that the word ecclesia has "another signification, little known among the common people now-a-days. That is to wit, it signifieth a congregation, a multitude or a company gathered in one, of all degrees of people."[13] More's Dialogue, written in 1528 and printed in 1529, was directed, according to its title page, against "the pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale," and one of More's main points of criticism was Tyndale's translation "Congregation." In defense of his translation Tyndale claimed support from the Latin New Testament of Erasmus and asked "but how happeth it that M. More hath not contended in like wise against his darling Erasmus all this long while? Doth he not change this word ecclesia into congregation, and that not seldom in his New Testament?"[14]

The idea of Covenant is greatly stressed in Tyndale's writings. In 1525 he indicated his belief in the principle of covenant as a controlling one in understanding the Bible. He declares that "the right way, yes, and the only way, to understand the scripture unto salvation, is that we earnestly and above all things search for the profession of our baptism, or covenants made between

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[13] William Tyndale, An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue, The Supper of the Lord After the True Meaning of John VI and I Cor. XI, Henry Walter, editor, Publications of the Parker Society (Cambridge, England, 1850), XLIV, 13.

[14] Ibid., XLIV, 16.

God and us."[15] This statement suggests a contractual arrangement, and Tyndale amplifies this aspect with the following assertion:

> The general covenant wherein all other are comprehended and included, is this: If we meek ourselves to God, to keep all his laws, after the example of Christ, then God hath bound himself unto us, to keep and make good all the mercies promised in Christ throughout all the Scripture.[16]

In his "Prologue to the Book of Genesis" written in 1534 Tyndale expands still further his principle of mutual obligation involved in the covenant with this exhortation:

> Seek therefore in the scripture, as thou readest it, chiefly and above all, the covenants made between God and us; that is to say, the law and commandments which God commandeth us to do; and then the mercy promised unto all them that submit themselves unto the law. For all the promises throughout the whole scripture do include a covenant: that is, God bindeth himself to fulfill that mercy unto thee only if thou will endeavor thyself to keep his laws; so that no man hath his part in the mercy of God, save he only that loveth his law, and consenteth that it is righteous and good, and fain would do it, and ever mourneth because he now and then breaketh it through infirmity, or doth it not so perfectly as his heart would.[17]

In keeping with his emphasis upon the covenants Tyndale gives the following reason for the marginal annotations which are a characteristic of his editions of the Bible:

> Faith now in God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the covenants and appointments made between God and us, is our salvation. Wherefore I have ever noted the

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[15] William Tyndale, Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures. Henry Walter, editor, Publications of the Parker Society (Cambridge, England, 1848), XLII, 469.

[16] Ibid., XLII, 470.

[17] Ibid., XLII, 403.

> covenants in the margins, and also the promises. Moreover, where thou findest a promise and no covenant expressed therewith, there must thou understand a covenant.[18]

In these and many other statements that could be cited from Tyndale's writings is seen a strong emphasis on the contract nature of the covenant. If the individual will perform his part of the contract then God promises or covenants to do his part. One of the few studies that gives Tyndale his due credit makes this significant observation:

> The origins and development of the Puritan synthesis must be traced along the line of the rise and career of this covenant-contract notion. This notion in its secular form was pre-Reformation in English thought and life. The theological formulation of the covenant idea appeared in English literature with Tyndale.[19]

The contractual nature of the covenantal beliefs of New England Congregationalism in the seventeenth century has been very ably presented by Perry Miller in his "Marrow of Puritan Divinity,"[20] and it would be exceedingly difficult to find a clearer summary of those beliefs than those cited from Tyndale in 1525 and 1534. This striking similarity coupled with the known esteem of the Puritans for Tyndale and the influence of his writings makes it difficult indeed to escape the conclusion that he should be regarded as a prime founder of their covenant theology. The stake cut short Tyndale's career in 1536 before he could fully develop his system, but he does seem to have laid the foundation upon which other Englishmen were to build.

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[18] Ibid., XLII, 471.

[19] Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," Church History, XX (March, 1951), 55.

[20] Transactions of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, XXXII (1933-1937), 247-300.

The contract-covenant theory in New England's Covenant theology appears to have had its origins in the thinking of Tyndale. The idea was probably considerably advanced in England by the Swiss Reformer Bullinger who was also very influential in England and highly esteemed by the Puritans. Bullinger sought to explain the reason for the covenant approach in the affairs between God and men. Bullinger shows how and why men make covenants, and then he relates this procedure to the establishment of a covenant or league between God and men. The following explanation shows the nature of his thinking:

> For there are two points, or special conditions contained in this league: the first whereof declareth what God doth promise, and what he will do for his confederates; I mean what we may look for at his hands: the second comprehendeth the duty of man which he doth owe to God, his confederate and the sovereign prince.[21]

Bullinger's language reflects something of the thinking of the Feudal contract as well as being somewhat similar to the explanation offered by Tyndale.

Another important part of Covenant theology appears to have been developed by Zwingli and given circulation by Calvin. This was the important theory of continuity in the covenant relationship. The idea seems to have been first advanced among the Reformers by Zwingli as a device to counter the teachings of the Swiss Brethren at Zurich[22] who denied the validity of infant baptism. Zwingli was forced to adduce arguments to defend his position on infant baptism and appears to have hit upon the idea of the continuity of the Old and New Testaments in the corresponding rites of circumcision and baptism. Circumcision was based on a covenantal relationship in the Old Testament and baptism likewise in the new. If children were included in the former covenantal relationship they should be included in the new in similar fashion is the way that Zwingli's thinking appears to have gone. His writings of 1524 against the Anabaptists do not appeal to the principle of covenant but those of 1525 do.[23] His work On Original Sin expresses the idea of continuity very clearly. He makes a number of references to the covenant made with Abraham and notes that its provisions extend to Abraham's children. His conclusion is that "therefore, also, our children are included in the covenant just as much as they were, for we are sons of the promise."[24]

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[21] Henry Bullinger, The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Thomas Harding, editor, Publications of the Parker Society (Cambridge, England, 1849), VIII 170. Much the same contractual view is expressed by John Hooper, A Declaration of the Ten Holy Commandments of Almighty God. Vol. 20 in Publications of the Parker Society, pp. 255-257.

John Calvin laid great stress on the aspect of continuity of the covenant relation. He affirmed that "the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."[25] He particularly stresses the continuity of children in the covenant. The entire sixteenth chapter of the fourth book of his Institutes is devoted to proving the validity of infant baptism based on their covenantal position. Bucer and other Reformers had much the same approach as Zwingli and Calvin.

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[22] For details of this controversy see Gottlob Schrenk, Gottesreich und Bund im Älteren Protestantismus Vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus (Gütersloh, Germany, 1923), pp. 36-40.

[23] Lowell H. Zuck, "Anabaptist Revolution Through the Covenant in Sixteenth Century Protestanism" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1954), p. 274, discusses this factor.

[24] Huldreich Zwingli, On Original Sin, William John Hinke, editor, The Latin Works of Juldreich Zwingli (Philadelphia, 1922), p. 21.

All of the Reformers cited so far saw something of a covenantal relationship between God and men, but there is no systematic doctrine developed. These men were struggling with a new approach to theology and were not able to lay hold on comprehensive organizing principles in the manner of later theologians. They did give the covenant idea theological respectability and familiarity. For them the covenant idea did not seem to have any utilitarian value beyond that of Bible exegesis and defending the practice of infant baptism; however there were contemporaneous forces working which would use the covenant idea as a very useful tool.

In July of 1524, Thomas Muentzer introduced the covenant idea as a warrant for revolutionary action in the Peasant's war and gave it a militant dynamic impulse that was to characterize it for centuries as it became an instrument used in establishing new churches, new colonies, new regimes and new ideologies. Muentzer derived his idea from the actions of King Josiah recorded in 2 Kings 23 and saw in this a principle which he could use to rally a following for staging a revolution. The letter in which he expressed his sentiments contains twelve references to the covenant or to covenant action.[26]

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[25] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion. 2. 10.2. in John T. McNeill, ed., and Ford Lewis Battles, trans., Vol. 20 The Library of Christian Classics (London, 1960).

Muentzer is probably to be identified in the Reformation stream as an Anabaptist. The problem of identifying the Anabaptists can be done only by means of wide generalization because of the wide diversity within the movement. One definition which at least describes one of their leading motives is that "for the first decade the Anabaptists were those of religious motivation, either non-resistant or violent, who attempted unsuccessfully to reform the leading Reformers."[27] As this movement progressed it developed certain common features which became characteristic of the entire movement. One of these, from which it derived its nickname of derision, was an insistence upon adult baptism as the only valid use of this sacrament. Another characteristic was a view of the church as an organic whole made up only of those who had actively professed their faith in Christ. This universal church was visibly manifested in local assemblies of like-minded individuals who worshipped together independent of any external control. This concept of the church was entirely different from the Reformer's view of the church as a national and geographic organization.

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[26] "Thomas Müntzer an den Schosser Hans Zeiss. Allstedt, 1524 Juli 25." in Heinrich Böhmer und Paul Kirn, Herausgeben, Thomas Müntzers Briefwechsel auf Grund der Altesten Vorlagen (Leipzig und Berlin, 1931), pp. 74-77. See also discussion in Lowell H. Zuck, "Anabaptism: Abortive Counter-revolt within the Reformation," Church History XXVI (September, 1957), 211-226.

[27] Lowell H. Zuck, "Anabaptism: Abortive Counter-revolt within the Reformation," Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 212.

The place of origin of Anabaptism has been the subject of much discussion and still is,[28] but it seems that the following suggestion comes as close to the facts of the case as can be determined at this time:

> Zuerich was the scene of the first Anabaptist congregation, and performed the first adult baptism, but the idea of re-baptism and the separation of the brotherhood of believers from the peoples church appeared first in the circle of the Wittenberg fanatics.[29]

The Zurich incident referred to above occurred in 1525 as a reaction against Zwingli's continued adherence to infant baptism.

The concept of a non-national, non-parish church required some sort of a constitutive device, and this was supplied by the church covenant idea. In the case of the Anabaptists their rite of adult baptism became the means of forming a group which became a local church. By submitting to the rite of baptism the individual thus indicated his acceptance of their beliefs and a desire to associate with those who held similar beliefs. For them the act of baptism served as an implicit form of church covenant.

The covenantal relationship between God and man was stressed in Anabaptist writings. It has been asserted that "the idea of a covenantal relation to God and one's fellows is the foundation of the 'Anabaptist' community."[30] The Anabaptists frequently referred to themselves as "Covenanters."[31]

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[28] For a good discussion of the origins of Anabaptism and the pertinent literature see George Hunston Williams, editor, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers Documents Illustrative of the Radical Reformation, Vol. XXV of The Library of Christian Classics, editors John Baillie et. al (London, 1957), pp 27-28, 73, n. 73.

[29] Walther Koehler, "Wiedertaüfer," Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 2nd ed. Herman Gunkel, ed. (Tubingen, 1931), V, 1915. The translation is from Lowell Zuck, "Anabaptism: Abortive Counter-Revolt within the Reformation," Church History, XXVI (September, 1957), 221. Zuck agrees with Koehler's judgment.

The Anabaptists did develop an extensive covenant theology, but it has some distinct points of difference from that developed by the Reformers and later incorporated into the system of Covenant theology. The Reformers stressed the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments and the unity of the covenant relationship. On the other hand Anabaptist groups such as the Swiss Brethren stressed the differences between the two Testaments. The essential difference has been summarized thus:

> Reformed theology, therefore, held a view of the Old Covenant and the Old Testament Scriptures entirely different from that of Marpeck and his brethren. Zwingli's consequent emphasis on the essential unity of the Covenants, as opposed to the Anabaptist emphasis on the fulfillment of the Old by the New, led him to justify the establishment of a state church and the compulsory baptism of all infants in the state.[32]

The Reformers developed a theory of covenantal relationships between God and man that stressed the continuity of the Old Testament relationships and the importance of baptizing infants in order to assure their place in the line of the covenant by means of the sign of baptism which replaced the former sign of circumcision but maintained essentially the same function. In contrast to this the Anabaptist writers developed a theory which emphasized the importance of a new relationship established by the New Testament in which only an adult could voluntarily place himself into covenantal relationship to God by an active profession of faith and submission to the sacrament of baptism in testimony of this relationship. In this case there was an implicit covenant but no formal development of the church covenant as an organizing device.

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[30] Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Doctrine of the Restitution of the True Church," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV January, 1950), 36.

[31] J. C. Wenger, "Covenant Theology," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, ed. Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale, Penn., 1955), I, 727.

[32] John C. Wenger, "The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck," The Mennonite Quarterly Review, XII (July, 1938), 210. See this article for a good discussion of this point and extensive quotations from Pilgram Marpeck's Testament Erlauterung which was probably printed in 1544 and gives much emphasis on the covenantal relationship.

It remained for another segment of Reformation activity to work out and apply the principles of the church covenant as an instrument of church polity. This was the work of religious exiles in England and then on the Continent as the tides of religious fortunes changed; however the first glimmerings of the principle appear on the Continent. One of the earliest suggestions appears to be that of Francis Lambert of Avignon whose suggestions for the Reformation in Hesse in 1526 included the idea of small voluntary congregations formed by mutual agreement and dependent upon the working of the word of God to augment their number.[33]

What appears to be the earliest example of a church formed directly on the church-covenant principle with full legal status granted and recognized by the civil authority is the church established for the foreign Protestant refugees in London under the direction of John À Lasco in 1550. This congregation was granted the use of the church of the Austin Friars by royal charter[34] and given full independence in the matter of their internal affairs including their order of worship and church discipline. The church discipline as set up by À Lasco[35] gave lengthy details as to doctrinal beliefs, church government and admission of members. All who wished to join the fellowship and partake of the Lord's Supper had to submit to lengthy interrogation as to their beliefs and life surrender to Christian principles. They had to promise to live by these principles in peace. Those who qualified for membership had their name enrolled in a book of members. The same church order was carried over to Frankfort when the group left England because of the accession of Queen Mary. It seems significant for later developments in Congregationalism that it was the precedent set by the royal action in connection with this congregation that was appealed to in defence of the New England church order.[36]

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[33] Francis Lambert, Reformatio Ecclesiarum Hassiae, Aemilius Ludwig Richter, der Herausgeber, Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des Sechszehnten Jahrunderts, 2 Bande (Weimar, 1846), I, 62.

More directly in the line of direct influence on future development of the church covenant principle was the establishment of a French Walloon congregation at Glastonbury, England, under the sponsorship of Protector Somerset. This group was organized eighteen months after the London congregation of John À Lasco and had as its pastor the Frenchman Valérand Poullain who has been called "the spiritual son of Bucer and Calvin"[37] and had close contacts with both of the Reformers. Most of his theology followed Bucer and Calvin, but in the realm of church discipline he incorporated some ideas that appear to be distinctly his own. No one could be a member of his church who had not previously made a public confession of their faith. All who did so had their names enrolled in the church book. No one could be admitted to the Lord's Supper who did not have his or her name in this church book. At least one of the parents must be enrolled in the church book for a child to be baptized, and a marriage would not be blessed unless both parties had previously met the requirement for church membership. Definite provisions were made for the election of church elders and deacons, and the parallels to future Congregationalism are rather striking.[38]

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[34] The Latin text with an English translation is given in Johannes Lindeboom, Austin Friars: History of the Dutch Reformed Church in London 1550-1950 (The Hague, 1950), Appendix I, 198-203.

[35] John A Lasco, Forma ac Ratio Tota Ecclesiastici Ministerii in Peregrinorum, Potissimum Vero Germanorum Ecclesia Instituta Eduardum ejus Nominis Sextum, Richter, Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen, II, 107 ff.

[36] John Ball, A Tryall of the New-Church Way in New-England and in Old (London, 1644), p. 56.

Although there is no evidence of direct causal relationships it seems possible that Poullain may have secured some of his ideas from the Anabaptists while he lived at Strassburg, and there must have been some influence from the example of John À Lasco's London church.

When Mary came to the English throne in 1553, Poullain and his group left England. After some wandering they finally settled at Frankfort where they continued the same church discipline that they had practiced in England, and it was at Frankfort that the ideas of church practice found in Poullain's thinking were incorporated into English ecclesiastical thinking through the interaction between Poullain and the English exiles there. Thomas Fuller claimed that non-Conformity was born at Frankfort,[39] and Peter Heylin traced the origin of Independency to the troubles among the English exiles there.[40]

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[37] D. Karl Bauer, Valérand Poullain Ein Kirchengeschichtliches Zeitbild aus der Mitte des Sechzehnten Jahrhunderts (Elberfeld, 1927), p. 5.

[38] Valérand Poullain, Liturgia Sacra, seu Ritus Ministerii in Ecclesia Peregrinorum Francofordiae 1554. 8, in Richter, Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen, I, 149-160. See particularly the statements on p. 160.

The details of this important incident are given in the book A Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfort 1554-1558 (1575)[41] usually attributed to William Whittingham, Dean of Durham. It is significant that Governor Bradford of Plymouth Plantation spoke of this as "a book that deserves better to be known and considered."[42] The first English refugees from the Marian persecutions arrived in Frankfort on June 27, 1554, and the evening of the same day Poullain informed them that he had obtained the use of a church there for all who fled from England. This was the Church of the White Ladies which the Frankfort Senate had set aside for the use of the French congregation on April 19th. The English objected that it would be of little value to them to worship with the French because of the language difference. It was then decided to petition the Senate for a place to meet where the English language could be used. The Senate then solved the problem by allocating the use of the church on alternating days to the two groups. On Sundays they were to work out a worship schedule that did not conflict. One condition was placed on the English. Before they used the church they were to "approve and subscribe the same Confession of Faith that the Frenchmen had then presented, and were about to put in print."[43] This subscription virtually amounted to a covenanting action, and thus we see that their first covenanting action was done as a civil requirement for ecclesiastical privilege. The statement of faith referred to was in all probability part of the same church order that Poullain had drawn up at Glastonbury and which was reprinted at Frankfort in 1554.

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[39] Thomas Fuller, The Church History of Britain from the Birth of Jesus Christ until the Year MDCXLVIII, 3 vols. (London, 1868), II, 373.

[40] Peter Heylyn, Ecclesia Restaurata, or the History of the Reformation of the Church of England (London, 1674), pp. 232-233.

[41] Citations herein are from the edition of Edward Arber (London, 1907).

[42] William Bradford, History of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647, 2 vols. (Boston, 1912), I, 7.

The English were told that they were not bound by this agreement to follow the French order of service; so they proceeded to formulate their own. The Second Prayer Book of Edward VI was examined as to suitability, and by general consent it was concluded that "the answering aloud after the Minister should not be used: the Litany, Surplice, and many other things also omitted: for that, in those Reformed churches, such things would seem more than strange."[44] This represents a considerable modification of the English order, and interestingly enough it does not seem to represent a modification made as much on principle as on a desire to conform to practices among their hosts.

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[43] William Whittingham, A Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfort 1554-1558 (London, 1907), p. 24.

[44] Ibid., p. 24.

The English soon realized the need of having some definite document of church discipline to regulate their relationships in the congregation. Following is a description of their action in this regard:

> And for that it was thought the Church could not long continue in good order without Discipline; there was also a brief Form devised; declaring the Necessity, the Causes, and the Order thereof; whereunto all those that were present subscribed; shewing thereby that they were ready and willing to submit themselves to the same, according to the rule prescribed in God's holy Word. At the same time it was determined by the Congregation that all such as should come after, should do the like before they were admitted as members of the Church.[45]

The principle of a church covenant is clearly seen in the above description even though the word itself does not occur in the text. The word form does occur, and at this time it had the same connotation as an agreement or covenant.

The first Discipline, or "Old Discipline" as it came to be called, was fairly brief and had the format of two major divisions with twelve subdivisions. The provision for admission to church membership read as follows:

> First, everyone, as well man as woman, which desireth to be received, shall make a Declaration of Confession of their Faith before the Pastor and Seniors: shewing himself fully to consent and agree with [the] Doctrine of the Church; and submitting themselves to the Discipline of the same.[46]

The Discipline also provided for the offices of pastor, preachers, elders and deacons.

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[45] Ibid., p. 26.

[46] Ibid., p. 143.

The document drawn up to govern the congregation was never given a fair test as to its functional worth because the exiled English students at Zurich soon learned of the modifications in the Book of Common Prayer, which had been made by the Frankfort group and in a letter dated October 13, 1554, sent a strong protest to the Frankfort church. From the receipt of this letter onward the English church at Frankfort was convulsed with controversies.

The high point of the first controversy was the expulsion of John Knox from his pulpit at Frankfort and the subsequent exodus of most of the anti-prayer book faction from Frankfort to Geneva and Basle in September of 1555. This exodus left the church at Frankfort in a weakened condition, and did not solve their problems as a new and more violent controversy broke out in January of 1557. As David Whitehead expressed it during the height of the difficulty the issue in this second controversy was whether the Church officers were to "have no certain Discipline, but that their pleasures might be holden for laws; . . . to establish a Tyranny, or to leave no common wealth at all in the Congregation."[47] This principle of the commonwealth of the congregation which was so vigorously articulated at Frankfort in 1557 became one of the most firmly held tenets of the Independents and Congregationalists and was passionately clung to by the great majority of New England Congregationalists.

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[47] Ibid., p. 203.

The second controversy at Frankfort started with a sharp exchange of words between the pastor, Robert Horne, and one of the leading laymen, Thomas Ashley. It erupted during an evening meal and evidently reflected a long smouldering antagonism between the two men who represented two distinct factions in the congregation-the one autocratic, the other democratic. The controversy progressed through a month of wrangling and resulted in a situation wherein the church officers all refused to have anything to do with the congregation thus leaving it without any constituted ecclesiastical leadership. At this point Poullain and the Magistrates intervened. On February 24, 1557, Poullain brought an edict from the Magistrates to the congregation directing that all of the church officers were to assume their duties until the Magistrates could give the affair a hearing; however before the day was over a new edict was issued which ordered Horne and Chambers to desist from all meddling in the affairs of the church. On the last of February one of the Magistrates, probably Johann À Glauberg, who evidently was the main support of Poullain and the exiles, came to a meeting of disputants.

Afterwards a new edict was given by the Magistrates which completely dissolved the entire ecclesiastical structure of the group and made all of the officers, including the pastor, "private men as the rest of the Congregation."[48] It was also decreed that they could reconstitute themselves as they saw fit and formulate a new Discipline for governing the congregation. This was a great victory for those favoring congregational sovereignty as they were clearly a majority. On the first of March Johann À Glauberg wrote a letter to the English exiles urging them to act on the matter of their church Discipline while they were still all on a common level. Acting upon this suggestion at a meeting on the third of March, thirty-eight members of the congregation chose by voice vote fifteen men of the congregation to write laws for governing the church. At the same time the former pastor and fourteen others stubbornly sat by and refused to vote.

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[48] _Ibid._, p. 122.

The fifteen men chosen to write the necessary ecclesiastical laws started their deliberations on March 4th and offered a complete new Discipline of seventy-three articles to the congregation on March 20th. Eleven of the fifteen men subscribed to the document. It was read to the congregation five different times, and eventually forty-two out of the total constituency of sixty-two subscribed their names. The committee of fifteen which wrote the "New Discipline" as it was soon called served as a constitutional convention, so it seems, for Congregationalism. The document which they produced was a very lucid model of rules for church polity, and so many of its precepts later became standard items in American Congregationalism that it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that this group should be regarded as the real formulators of Congregational church polity.

The grounds of authority appealed to by the framers of the "New Discipline" were "God's Word," "good reason," the edict of the Senate and Magistrate," and the "Old Discipline."[49] A number of terms current in later discussions appear in the document such as, for example, the terms consenting brethren and dissenting brethren.

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[49] Ibid., p. 205.

The seventy-three articles are a masterpiece of democratic church government. Virtually every article shows items relevant to later Congregationalism, but only a few of the more striking ones will be pointed out here. Article 7 provided for two ministers or teachers of equal rank and authority. Article 8 provided for the preaching of sermons on Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday. Four deacons were authorized by Article 17. Article 21 provided for the support of a church school. The rule of the congregation was vested in six seniors to be chosen by the congregation as provided for in Article 37. Article 38 restricted the authority of all the church officers to that which was authorized by the congregation, and Article 39 limited to one year the tenure of all church officers except the two ministers or teachers. This tenure limitation was not followed by later Congregationalists who allowed life-tenure for their church officers. All of the officers were to be chosen by congregational election. Article 40 called for public prayers and for fasting when the situation called for such action. Article 41 provided for an election sermon before the election of church officers, and Article 42 provided that the election was to be by secret ballot. Article 44 provided that the officers of the congregation should have full power to govern the group; however if they refused to assemble the congregation to consider major issues then the congregation was given full power to assemble itself and to act with binding force.

The church covenant principle was supplied by Article 49 and is much the same as that of the "Old Discipline." It reads:

> Every one, as well men as women, which desire to be received, shall make a Declaration, or Confession, of their Faith before the Ministers and Elders: shewing himself fully to consent and agree with the Doctrine of the Church, and submitting themselves to the Discipline of the same; and the same to testify by subscribing thereto, if they can write.[50]

By December 21, 1557, a total of 81 adult males had subscribed.

Queen Mary died in 1558, and the way was clear for the exiles to return to England. Certain principles and practices had been hammered out on the forge of necessity. In a very real sense the exile "developed into a school of self-government"[51] in church matters. The exiles were in a new and different environment. The old mores no longer had the binding force which they exerted in England, and with their removal the latent democratic impulse asserted itself. In the case of Frankfort the congregational principle had the wholehearted support of the magistrate Johannes À Glauberg, and in all probability, although it seems impossible to prove it absolutely, the active guidance of Valérand Poullain who as host pastor most certainly must have exerted a guiding influence on developments so closely linked to his own congregation.

Out of the problems and difficulties among the exiles at Frankfort emerged a very practical constitution for the governing of an independent church. It is significant that the Brief Discourse of the Troubles at Frankfort was republished in 1642 when Englishmen were again embroiled in ecclesiastical-political difficulties.

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[50] Ibid., p. 190.

[51] Christina Hallowell Garrett, The Marian Exiles: A Study in the Origins of Elizabethan Puritanism (Cambridge, England, 1938), p. 18.

Both the "Old Discipline" and the "New Discipline" were formulated without any evident appeal to the principles of Covenant theology. They were written as a means of meeting the needs of a very practical situation, that is, the orderly governing of an exile group who wished to maintain their religious and cultural identity.

After the Marian exile Covenant theology's theory of continuity and the principle of the church covenant were carried on in Scotland among the Presbyterians under John Knox who had been for a short time the minister of the Frankfort group. The church covenant idea in Scotland took a distinct turn away from the particularistic congregational principle and became instead a regional and national covenant subscribed to by parishes, cities and even Parliament.[52]

In England after the return of the Marian exiles the church covenant ideas were almost but not completely extinguished. For a time its continuity is almost lost sight of. A number of reasons can be advanced for this retardation in its development. One is that the use of this principle among the exiles at Frankfort seems to have been based more on practical necessity and democratic impulse rather than on theological conviction. With the return to England the practical necessity was largely removed and the democratic impulse was stifled by political and ecclesiastical developments. These in turn were due to the stringency of the times in England as Catholicism and Protestantism battled for control of England, and the struggle took on the nature of a national struggle for existence as Spain poised the threat of invasion. In 1559 the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity outlawed all deviations from the Established order based on the Book of Common Prayer and a hierarchial church polity. In a stern warning to Whittingham in 1562 William Cecil indicated that the government would not tolerate any exceptions.

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[52] See the discussion in Champlin Burrage, Church Covenant Idea, p. 33.

In spite of governmental prohibition and suppression groups did continue to meet together. One of the earliest usages of the principle of covenanting after the Marian exile was in the group of Richard Fitz in London about 1571. This congregation entered into an agreement or compact which was written out. This document[53] was composed of a Preamble and nine articles and very clearly is in the nature of a church covenant, but there is no use of the word covenant and there is no appeal to the principles of covenant theology.

Robert Browne seems to have the distinction of being the first one to fuse all three facets of covenant thinking which became so characteristic of the Covenant theology and church polity of New England. He seems to have been the first one actually to formulate a doctrine of express church covenant based on principle and using the word covenant to indicate the act of association. This was done in the formation of the church at Norwich in 1580. In describing this event and the action of the people in joining together Browne says "a covenant was made and their mutual consent was given to hold together."[54]

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[53] The text is given in Champlin Burrage, The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641), 2 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1912), II, 13-15.

In 1582 Browne published A Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manner of All True Christians which is the chief expression of his theological thinking. Apparently over 1,000 copies of this work were printed at Middelburg, and many copies were sent to England.[55] This seems to have accomplished a fairly widespread dissemination of his ideas. In this Book Which Sheweth Browne stresses the role of the covenant in the constitution of a church. This is summarized by the following question and answer:

> How must the church be first planted and gathered under one kind of government?
> First by a covenant and condition made on God's behalf.
> Secondly by a covenant and condition made on our behalf.
> Thirdly by using the sacrament of Baptism to seal those conditions and covenants.[56]

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[54] Robert Browne, A True and Short Declaration, both of the Gathering and Joining Together of Certain Persons and also of the Lamentable Breach and Division Which Fell Amongst Them, in Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson, editors, The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne, Vol. 2 in Elizabethan Nonconformity Texts (London, 1953), p. 422.

[55] See "Letter of Audley Danett to Walsingham, Sept. 2, 1582," in Calendar of State Papers Foreign Series Elizabeth, May-December, 1582, p. 299.

[56] In Albert Peel, editor, The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne, p. 254.

The reference to baptism as the seal of the covenant points back to Calvin's stress on this function of baptism in the Institutes and also forward to the firm belief in this function of baptism that is seen in New England's theology. The conditions mentioned by Browne above are elaborated by him, and in this elaboration he shows a marked similarity to the contract-covenant principles laid down by Tyndale. Browne says that "the covenant on God's behalf is his agreement or partaking of conditions with us that if we keep his laws, not forsaking his government, he will take us for his people, and bless us accordingly."[57] The responsibility of man in this contract arrangement is then explained thus:

> The covenant on our behalf is our agreement and partaking of conditions with God, that he shall be our God so long, as we keep under his government, and obey his laws, and no longer. The giving up of ourselves and our seed to be of the church, is a dutifulness in seeking holiness and happiness by Christ in his church, which only we have, by a covenant to be under his government in the church and by obeying thereto.[58]

This covenant arrangement is entirely conditional as it was in Tyndale, and Browne's theory of continuity in the covenant likewise seems to be conditional. He expresses this idea in his controversy with the Presbyterian leader Cartwright and says "for by the promise and the covenant made to the righteous and to their seed are their children reckoned in the church . . . . And by baptizing into the faith and profession of any, we must understand, that we are baptized to hold the same faith and profession, when we come to discretion."[59]

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[57] Ibid., p. 255.

[58] Ibid., p. 257.

In evaluating the amount of originality in Browne's thinking it should be borne in mind that he tells us[60] that he has made a long and determined effort to find out all he could about matters pertaining to the church. That he brought together and attempted to synthesize the three main avenues of covenant thinking is not then a coincidence but rather the result of a deliberate effort. Browne's stormy career and ultimate return to the Church of England should not blind us to the fact that there was such a continuing influence of his teaching that "Brownism" became virtually a synonym for Independency in subsequent controversies.

After Browne's attempted synthesis ecclesiastical discussion became more and more beclouded by the issue of separation and non-separation, and most of the controversial literature carries this theme as an undertone to the major issue of the purity of the church. There is, however, a continued development in the realm of covenant thinking.

The defection of Robert Browne did not stop the continuance of his ideas among the Independents for as Christopher Lawne tells us "after Browne left the cause of independency the doctrine of Browne was taken up and received by H. Barrow, and afterwards by Francis Johnson."[61] This

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[59] Robert Browne, An Answer to Master Cartwright His Letter for Joining with the English Churches (1585?) in Albert Peel, editor, The Writings of Robert Brown, p. 462.

[60] See The True and Short Declaration, in Peel, Writings, pp. 397-398.

[61] Christopher Lawne, et. al., The Prophane Schisme of the Brownists or Separatists . . . (1612), p. 18. This was first published in 1591.

"Barrowist" line as it came to be called also continued to use the church covenant idea and to follow the covenant theory of continuity. It was, moreover, a conditional continuity[62] as had been the case in Browne's teachings.

An important addition to covenant thinking was made in 1585 when Dudley Fenner published his Sacra Theologia Sive Veritas. An English translation of this was published in 1599 as The Sacred Doctrine of Divinity, Gathered out of the Word of God. In this Fenner introduced the concept of a covenant of law or works and a covenant of grace which was divided into two dispensations called the Old Testament and the New Testament. Fenner's presentation is much clearer than most of those which followed him. The essential part of his presentation follows, and it seems to be chiefly an exposition of Romans 10 and Galatians 3:

> The first requiring righteousness from ourselves, or by our own works and propounding life everlasting if we do it, is called the law or the covenant of works, Rom. 10. 5, Gal. 3. 12. The other sending us to Christ, and propounding life everlasting through him, if we believe in him, is called the covenant of grace, Rom. 10. 4, Gal. 3. 13, 14, which is twofold according to the diverse dispensation of the times before and since his coming. The covenant of grace before his coming in the flesh . . . was termed the Old Testament . . . the same covenant since his coming . . . is termed the New Testament.[63]

From this argument and other scripture texts which Fenner introduces to support his argument it is very clear that by the law or the covenant of works his main reference is to the Mosaic law in general with special reference to the Decalogue. What seems to be distinctly new is the concept of a covenant of works in contrast to that of grace. His concept of the sameness of the covenant of grace but its divisions into two modes of administration is not new. It is found in Zwingli and is stressed in Calvin who says that "the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."[64] Calvin's analysis is later repeated and elaborated by William Ames[65] who made a determined effort to systematize the teachings of previous writers and became probably the leading authority for American Puritanism.

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[62] See Henry Barrowe, A Plain Refutation of M. Giffards Book Intitled a Short Treatise Against the Donatists of England (1605), pp. 61-62. This also was first published in 1591.

[63] Dudley Fenner, The Sacred Doctrine of Divinity, Gathered out of the Word of God (1599), p. 30.

Ames's systematization of the covenant is rather sketchy, but he does lay down the main lines of thinking. There is first of all the covenant of works between God and Adam: "The law and covenant of God with man in the creation was, do this and thou shalt live."[66] This required perfect obedience which man failed to render, and Adam standing as "a public person"[67] or the founder of the race brought about its ruin. God then intervened with the covenant of grace which was in essence the same for all time after that, but which had differing modes of administration. This is called the new covenant in distinction to the old one made with Adam. This new covenant is in two parts called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The essential difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, according to Ames, is that in the Old Testament "there was some representation of the covenant of works."[68] This statement stands in seeming contradiction to the earlier part of the argument which Ames advanced when he declared that in the new covenant "God only doth covenant,"[69] and "this requires not any condition properly so called, or going before, but only following after or coming between, and that to be communicated by grace."[70]

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[64] Institutes 2. 10. 2.

[65] The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, Drawn out of the Holy Scriptures, and the Interpreters Thereof, and Brought into Method (London, 1642), 1. 38. 1.

[66] Ibid., 1. 10. 32.

[67] Ibid., 1. 10. 30.

This difficulty which Ames had in distinguishing between conditions, works and grace had been lucidly pointed out earlier in the charge which Stephen Bredwell had laid against Robert Browne in 1588. Bredwell asserted that Browne "miserablie confoundeth the covenant of the law with the covenant of the Gospel. Whereof the first hath the conditions of works a part: the other is made simply without conditions of works if we believe only."[71] This confusion of law and grace is a fundamental one that runs all the way through Puritanism and Covenant theology. In some respects it is but an extension of the controversy which the Reformers had with the Roman

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[68] *Ibid.*, 1. 29. 4.

[69] *Ibid.*, 1. 24. 14.

[70] *Ibid.*, 1. 24. 19.

[71] Stephen Bredwill, *The Raising of the Foundation of Brownism* (London, 1588), p. 112.

Catholic theologians as to whether a man is saved by faith alone or by faith and good works.

The conflicting elements of the conditional covenant-contract idea and the concept of the partial continuation of the covenant of works on the one hand and the diametrically opposite tenet of salvation by grace through faith, on the other hand, produced tensions and inconsistencies in Puritanism which reached their most obvious manifestation in Ann Hutchinson and the Antinomian controversy in New England in 1637.

In addition to the three elements listed above the theory of continuity from generation to generation and the device of the church covenant need to be listed in order to complete the basic apparatus of covenant thinking which was to mature into Congregationalism. This was the product of a long period of time and the labors of many men who sought to constitute the ideal church.

CHAPTER III

THE IDEAL OF PURITY

The need for the Half-Way Covenant came about as a result of a development within the framework of the church covenant idea and the beliefs of Covenant theology. The difficulty was not inherent in either of these institutions but became a problem because of a special turn which Puritanism took in America. This turn seems to have been primarily an American development, and it likewise appears that the practice which produced the problem was neither a part of the system of the Plymouth Pilgrims nor the Salem Puritans. In fact it apparently was not a part of the thinking of the Boston Bay area Puritans until the arrival of John Cotton in 1633.

New England Puritanism was the product of a number of streams of Puritan thought which converged there and were in various degrees synthesized into the system of Congregationalism. Among the most troublesome problems of this system were those of the relation of infants to the church and the terms of admission to church membership.

The first confluence of thought in New England theology occurred in 1629 with the arrival of the Salem Puritans. The leaders of both Plymouth and Salem realized that if harmonious relations were to be maintained it was necessary for them to agree on some of the thornier problems of church practices. There was no problem concerning doctrine, but the relation of infants to the church seemed to loom large in their eyes. Letters were exchanged between Francis Higginson, pastor at Salem, and Elder Brewster of the Plymouth church in which it was agreed that the children of church members were to be baptized, and this baptism was to be considered as a seal of their church membership with the understanding that when the children so baptized became adult they were to be examined by the church officials. If there was nothing offensive in their manner of living and they met the approval of the officials, the children were to publicly own the church covenant and be received to the Lord's Supper.[1]

The matter of admission of adults to membership apparently was not agreed upon, and William Hubbard[2] noted that there was some discrepancy between Salem and Plymouth with Salem's terms of admission being more flexible than those of Plymouth. Higginson at Salem required a confession of faith and acceptance of the church covenant but allowed the elders considerable room for discretion in admitting members. Plymouth appears to have required a confession of faith in Christ, a suitable life, submission to the laws of God and at least implicit submission to the church covenant.[3] It seems clear that the terms of admission to these churches were not particularly difficult for one who led a respectable life and was willing to give a profession of faith in Christ. Significantly absent from all the accounts is any mention of the requirement of a relation of a conversion experience. This was, however, soon to become a dominant feature of New England Congregationalism.

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[1] Nathaniel Morton, New England's Memorial (New York, 1937), p. 78, gives the details of this agreement.

[2] A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1848), pp. 119-120.

[3] Edward Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked (1646), p. 99 gives an account of the practice at Plymouth in admitting members.

The problem of the terms of admission to the church was in reality a part of the larger problem of the purity of the church, and a lower standard of church purity than either that of Plymouth or Salem was introduced into New England with the coming of John Warham and his group which landed May 30, 1630. They had been organized into a church estate at Plymouth, England under the sponsorship of John White of Dorchester and soon named their new abode Dorchester. Deacon Fuller of Plymouth had a conference with Warham shortly after his church arrived in New England, and Fuller found, much to his dismay, that Warham[4] held the view that it was proper for a church to be made up of a mixed group including both the godly and the ungodly. The Dorchester group moved to Windsor, Connecticut, in 1635-1636, and their lower standard of church composition may have had an effect on the theological thinking of the Connecticut River valley and its many theological controversies. There is no specific evidence on which to draw conclusions, but it is possible that some stimulus for action to guarantee the purity of the churches may have come as a reaction to the lower standards of this group.

John Cotton arrived at Massachusetts Bay September 4, 1633, and his coming marks a significant turning point in New England ecclesiology. Previous to his arrival New England church practices appear to have been less uniform and less formalized than they soon became. Not only did Cotton tend to standardize New England church practices, but it appears that he also introduced a modification of previous practices that prevailed on both sides of the ocean. This modification was the introduction of the procedure in joining the church of the candidate giving a public account of his conversion experiences and present spiritual state. This soon acquired the technical term of relations and became a standard practice in most of the New England Congregational churches and is responsible, it seems, more than any other one factor for the development of the institution of the Half-Way Covenant.

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[4] See William Bradford, "Letter Book," Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Series 1, Vol. III, 74.

The standardizing work of John Cotton has been summarized by Cotton Mather:

> There were divers churches gathered in the country, before the arrival of Mr. Cotton; but upon his arrival, the points of church-order were with more exactness revived, and received in them, and further observed in such as were gathered after them.[5]

Cotton seems to have accomplished this by drawing up a form of church discipline in 1633 which apparently was the only form used for a number of years and which was adopted by most of the New England churches. It was the basis of his Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared and the Cambridge Platform to a considerable extent.[6]

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[5] Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1855), I, 265.

[6] For a discussion of Cotton's 1633 Discipline and its effects see Wilkes Allen, The History of Chelmsford from its Origin in 1653 to the Year 1820 (Haverhill, Massachusetts, 1820), pp. 106-107.

The molding influence of John Cotton was recognized by William Hubbard who was a member of the first Harvard college graduating class of 1642 and a minister of the Ipswich church from 1656 to 1704. Hubbard cited Cotton's Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared as normative for their practices, and then gave his own explanation of four ways in which the New England way differed from that of other Reformed churches. The first item that he discussed was the matter of relations, and his presentation is one of the clearer explanations of this practice. He said:

> The subject matter of the visible church, saints by calling, such as have not only attained the knowledge of the principles of religion, and are free from gross and open scandal, but are willing, together with the profession of their repentance and faith in Christ to declare their subjection to him in his ordinances, which they account ought to be done publicly before the Lord and his people, by an open profession of the Gospel and by a personal relation of their spiritual estate, expressive of the manner how they were brought to the knowledge of God by faith in Christ Jesus, and this is done either with their viva voce, or by a rehearsal thereof by the elders in public, before the Church Assembly (they having beforehand received private satisfaction) the persons openly testifying their assent thereunto, provided they do not scandalize their profession by an unchristian conversation.[7]

The other points of divergence which were discussed were the matter of mutual covenanting by express or implied covenant, the limitation of the size of a church to that which is congenial to Congregational principles and the affirmation that no Classis or Synod is to have coercive jurisdiction. Hubbard affirmed that "after this manner have their ecclesiastical affairs been carried on ever since the year 1633 when Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker first arrived there."[8]

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[7] William Hubbard, General History of New England (Boston, 1848), p. 183.

Thomas Hooker arrived on the same ship as John Cotton but apparently represents a different strain of English Puritanism than Cotton's or at least a different emphasis. In 1636, Hooker and his group moved from Newtown or Cambridge to the Connecticut valley and established Hartford. Hubbard's observation that "two such eminent stars, such as were Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hooker, both of the first magnitude, though of differing influence, could not well continue in one and the same orb"[9] discreetly hints at a difference of opinion between these two leaders, and there is contemporary, though somewhat indirect, evidence to indicate that their basic difference was over standards of admission to the churches. Hooker seems to have favored a lower standard of church admission than Cotton did. This is affirmed in a letter written in 1637 by R. Stansby, minister of a church in England, to John Wilson, pastor of the Boston church, in which Stansby said that there were rumors in England of considerable differences of opinion in matters of religion in the new colony, and this had caused Hooker to migrate. One of the specific points of difficulty cited by Stansby is "that you are so strict in admission of members to your church, that more than one half are out of your church in all your congregations, and Mr. Hoker

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[9] *Ibid.*, p 173.

[Hooker] before he went away preached against it (as one reports who heard him)."[10]

Hooker's moderation in this area had been indicated in 1631 in his answers to the questions which the Presbyterian John Paget had submitted to him during a controversy between the two men in Holland before Hooker came to America. Paget had asked Hooker if he considered it lawful to receive a person into the church without a public examination before the entire congregation, and Hooker had answered that "some members may be received without public examination, and yet the case may so fall out that some cannot without public examination."[11]

Paget's question seems to indicate that some of the Congregationalists required a public examination before admission to membership, and Hooker's answer seems to indicate a familiarity with the practice. John Cotton may have favored the public examination and carried the idea to America. The matter of a relation of experience may have been a part of the public examination, or it may have evolved out of the practice. If the practice of relations did have a place in English Congregationalism, it must have soon dwindled in emphasis because the stress on the practice in New England seems to have puzzled and disturbed a considerable number of the English Congregationalists.

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[10] Stansby's letter to Wilson is in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Series 4, VII, 10-11.

[11] Raymond Phineas Stearns, Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands the Rise and Fall of the English Congregational Clasis 1621-1635 (Chicago, 1940), p. 108. This work gives the full text of the Propositions and Answers and gives the details of the controversy between Hooker and Paget.

Hooker appears to have gained some acceptance of his ideas in New England. In the "Preface" to his influential Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline, published in 1648, a year after his death, Hooker claimed to have the concurrence of "all the Elders upon the river . . . and most of the Elders of the churches in the Bay," and we are indebted to this work for a systematic presentation of the procedure followed in accepting members into the churches. He divided the process into two phases. The first phase involved the candidate's contacts with the elders of the church. He was to make his desire for membership known to one or more of the elders, this being one of their special functions in the church, and then the elder was to investigate the person's character and walk by obtaining testimony from those who know the individual. Having done this the elder was to have a conference with the candidate in order to determine "what his knowledge and acquaintance is with the things of Christ and his kingdom."[12] The purpose of this interview was to "discern whether he be a visible saint to the judgment of reasonable charity."[13] If the elder was satisfied as to the candidate's fitness he propounded him to the church for membership.

The second phase of the admission procedure involved the candidate and the congregation itself. Hooker stated that the church members were duty bound to use their own best efforts to fully inform themselves as to the individual's fitness and as to his blameless life. He specifically rejected the charge that they require a number of group examinations of the candidate, and he revealed his alignment with the beliefs of the main body of English Puritanism that "there be many truly and savingly called, who never knew the time and manner of their conversion and therefore cannot relate it unto others."[14] If this suggestion of Hooker's had been followed in practice much of the difficulty which led to the Half-Way Covenant could possibly have been prevented. Hooker stated that if there was any objection to the candidate's admission the proceedings were postponed for a time, but if no objection was raised the individual was then to give some expression of his hope before the congregation and was then admitted to membership by engaging in the church covenant. In the case of women their profession was to be made in private and reported to the church. Transfers from other churches could be accepted without re-examination, or because of variations in the strictness of practice, if the church desired, the individual could be examined again. Hooker presented the following suggestion relative to standards of admission:

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[12] Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline . . . (London, 1648), Part 3, p. 4.

[13] Ibid., Part 3, p. 4.

> The rule according to which satisfaction is to be regulated . . . [is] if a person live not in the commission of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any known duty, and can give a reason of his hope towards God, this casts the cause, with judicious charity, to hope and believe there is something of God and grace in the soul, and therefore fit for church society.[15]

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[14] Ibid., Pt. 3, p. 5.

[15] Ibid., Pt. 3, p. 5.

A comparison between the views expressed by Hooker and the actual practice in most of the Congregational churches in New England shows a considerable difference in emphasis. It seems apparent that Hooker's ideas concerning requirements for admission to church membership, both in 1636 and in 1647, were similar to those held by the majority of Puritans in Europe and also by the founders of Plymouth and Salem as well as the Connecticut valley settlers. These views were less rigorous than those of the Boston group with its increasing emphasis on the relation of a religious experience which became one of the most distinctive features of American Congregationalism as well as one of the most troublesome.

The root of the difference between such men as Hooker and Cotton and ultimately between much of American Congregationalism on the one hand and English Independency and Presbyterianism on the other hand seems to lie in differing approaches to some of the fundamental tenets and ideals of Puritanism. One of the fundamental tenets was that of purity. This had the three-fold aspect of purity of life, purity of worship and purity of the church. The Puritans attained fairly uniform agreement on the first two points, but the question of the purity of the church produced much diversity of opinion and controversy. The problem was most acute in New England where a determined effort was made by many to attain the ideal of a pure church.

Basically the issue seemed to involve the constituency of the church and the matter of accession to it. Part of the issue has been summarized as follows:

> The main contention of the reforming party, that which gave them their party name, continued to be the demand that the National Church should no longer be an indiscriminate mingling, both in clergy and in people, of the worthy and the vile, but should be purified.[16]

The Separatists despaired of any idea of purifying the national churches and sought purity in non-national churches. The distinction was clearly pointed out by Edward Winslow.[17] The so-called non-separating Puritans paid lip service to non-separation but vigorously pursued the policies of the Separatists as soon as some three thousand miles of water lay between them and the National Church.

The ideal of a pure church poses the problem of selection of the pure, and aside from some infallible standard of selection this is something of a relative concept. Luther and Calvin considered the ideal of a pure church to be unobtainable, and Calvin wrote against fanatical efforts to attain it. Concerning those who vigorously sought such an ideal he said "they think no church exists where there are not perfect purity and integrity of life . . . . They are vainly seeking a church besmirched with no blemish."[18] Calvin likened the church to a net, a field, or a threshing floor where all elements would be intermingled to a certain extent. Calvin's criteria for judging whether a person was to be regarded as a member of the church or not was according to "a certain charitable judgment whereby we recognize as members of the church those who, by confession of faith, by example of life, and by partaking of the sacraments profess the same God and Christ with us."[19] The phrase "charitable judgment" used by Calvin seems to have become a byword in Puritanism as a guiding principle of judgment and evaluation. It seems to imply the principle of giving the individual the benefit of the doubt and was applied with varying degrees by various men according to their degree of dedication to the principle of a pure church.

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[16] Leonard Woolsey Bacon, The Congregationalist (New York, 1904), p. 15.

[17] Hypocrisie Unmasked (1646), pp. 95-96.

[18] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion. John T. McNeill, ed. and Ford Lewis Battles, trans. vols. 20-21 in John Baillie, editor, The Library of Christian Classics (London, 1960), 4. 1. 13.

The source of the concept of the pure church probably lies first of all in the Puritan interpretation of the Scriptures and then in a reaction against both the practices of the Roman Catholic Church and the continuation of many of those practices in the Church of England. The contribution of Anabaptist thinking to this concept may have been considerable;[20] although it is difficult to trace any direct connection.

Closely related to the concept of the pure church was another fundamental tenet. It has been claimed that "the essence of Puritanism . . . [is] an experience of conversion which separates the Puritan from the mass of mankind and endows him with the privileges and duties of the elect."[21]

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[19] Ibid., 4. 1. 8.

[20] See Douglas Campbell, The Puritans in Holland, England and America, 2 vols, 3rd ed. (New York, 1893), I, 487-490. Campbell argues that Puritanism among the elite died out during the reign of Elizabeth but was kept alive and developed among the masses with their long contacts with the Dutch Anabaptists in England and also by the contacts of English refugees with Anabaptist groups in Holland.

[21] Alan Simpson, Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicago, 1955), p. 2.

English Puritans laid great stress on the conversion experience and self-examination to ascertain if one had actually had a valid conversion experience. An example is the testimony of Thomas Goodwin, a Puritan leader, who wrote concerning his experience at Cambridge in 1614 while a boy of fourteen: "I set myself to examine whether I had grace or not; and by all the signes in Ursin's Catechism, which was in use among the Puritans in the College, I found them all, as I thought, in me."[22]

William Whately, a leading Puritan theologian, wrote his The New Birth or a Treatise of Regeneration in 1618,[23] and in it he emphatically stated the need for conversion but recognized the fact that there may be two kinds of conversion experiences. One kind may be gradual and perhaps imperceptible as to time and place and is the result of Christian education and environment. The other kind of experience may be violent and climactic in the case of those who have had a long life in their unregenerate state.

Another leading Puritan writer, Richard Baxter in his Treatise of Conversion, said "I do not call you to judge your state by the time or manner of your change, so much as by the matter or thing itself."[24] Baxter laid great stress on the individual searching his own soul to see if he really is converted and suggests three principles for the individual to apply in testing the status of his soul. The first principle involves soul searching to determine whether the individual shows a change of mind toward the Bible and its teachings. The second principle involves a new attitude toward the world and God. The life is to be oriented "not for the pleasure or profits of the world, but how to please God."[25] The third test is whether the individual can see a change in his life and particularly a reversal of former values and goals. If the person finds positive evidence of these tokens in his life he is to regard himself as having undergone conversion from the unregenerate to the regenerate state and hence to be regarded as a member of the elect. The foregoing statements show that the fact of conversion was insisted on by the English Puritans, but they did not insist that the person be able to recount publicly a dramatic experience. This was a distinctly American development it seems.

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[22] Thomas Goodwin, The Works of Thomas Goodwin, Vol. 2 in Nichol's Series of Standard Divines. Puritan Period (Edinburgh, 1861), p. lii. See pp. li-lxxii for an account of Goodwin's soul searching. See Zacharias Ursinus, The Summe of Christian Religion. Translated out of the Latin by Henry Parry (Oxford, 1589), pp. 763-768 for his signs of conversion.

[23] (London, 1628). It was printed ten years after it was written. See especially pp. 43-44 for Whately's views.

[24] (London, 1657), p. 111.

John Cotton's emphasis on the relation of a conversion experience as the proof of conversion and hence eligibility for membership in a New England Congregational church, if it can be attributed to him on the basis of probability, received considerable implementation by what appears to have been a chance development in 1634. Apparently the only account of the origin of the custom of demanding a public relation of conversion experience as a prerequisite for church membership is given by Cotton Mather in his Magnalia. Following is Mather's account of the evolution of this characteristic practice:

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[25] Richard Baxter, Treatise of Conversion (London, 1657), p. 131.

> The first churches of New-England began only with a profession of assent and consent unto the 'confession of faith' and the 'covenant of communion.' Afterwards, they that sought for the communion, were but privately examined about a work of grace in their souls, by the elders and then publicly propounded unto the congregation, only that so, if there were any scandal in their lives, it might be objected and considered. But in the year 1634, one of the brethren having leave to hear the examination of the elders, magnified so much the advantage of being present at such an exercise, that many others desired and obtained the like leave to be present at it; until, at length, to gratify this useful curiosity, the whole church always expected the liberty of being thus particularly acquainted with the religious dispositions of those whom they were afterwards to sit at the table of the Lord; and that church which began this way was quickly imitated by most of the rest, who when all come to, have little else to plead for it, but that the good men find themselves exceedingly edified when they hear other good men describing the 'means which the Lord has devised for the bringing back of their banished souls'.[26]

Mather's comment on the practice points up one of the fundamental characteristics of Puritanism, and that is the intense emotional component of its religious life. This has been detected and expressed very aptly as follows:

> If the seventeenth-century Puritan, with his formal training in scholasticism, usually tries to give a rational account of his faith, it is the stretched passion which makes him what he is. They are a people who suffered and yearned and strived with an unbelievable intensity.[27]

This Puritanism "was always more an affair of the heart than of the head,"[28] and the stress on experience and the relation of that experience can hardly be viewed as much less than a natural development when viewed in its New England context. It is rather difficult to conceive of any great dynamic apart from emotional involvement, and that Puritanism had a great dynamic can hardly be denied. A group that was willing to fight furious wars and stage an unprecedented mass migration because of its ideals was a group that felt as intensely as it fought. Reason may have its devotees, but they seldom if ever shake nations by their zeal for reason alone. The basis of the Puritan's dynamic was his Biblical beliefs and the satisfaction which he derived from them It does not seem an exaggeration to affirm that when Puritanism became an unemotional religion it ceased to be Puritanism.

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[26] Cotton Mather, Magnalia, II, 244.

[27] Alan Simpson, Puritanism (Chicago, 1955), p. 21.

[28] Ibid., p. 106.

The continuing emphasis which American Puritanism placed on a public recital of religious experience can be explained, perhaps, on the basis of Mather's suggestion that its value was the emotional satisfaction which it gave to the auditors. The hypothesis may be advanced that their pioneering frontier situation virtually demanded some kind of extra-ordinary emotional satisfaction and this institution seemed to supply it as well as being coupled to their fundamental ideal of the pure church. These people were in a strange land thousands of miles from their former homes and familiar sights. Disease, death and disaster were everpresent with them. Mental anguish, physical suffering and general deprivation from many of their former niceties of life demanded some compensation and some assurance that it was all worthwhile. Hearing these "relations" of what their God had done for their fellows tended to assure them that their course was right and the struggle was worth the effort not only for time but also for eternity.

The practice of relations and the procedure for forming a church were new to many of the English Puritans when they came to New England, and it took some time for the practice to become familiar and more or less standardized. John Winthrop told of the procedure in forming the church of Newtown, later Cambridge, under Thomas Shepard in 1635. The acting elders inquired as to the procedure to be followed, and this called for a conference among the ministers present. After some consultation they advised as follows: "such as were to join should make confession of their faith, and declare what work of grace the Lord had wrought in them."[29] Shepard gave his account first and then some of the others. The church covenant was read, and the group assented to it. The elder then asked for the right hand of fellowship from the representatives of the other churches as a token of approval. John Cotton consulted with those near him, and then extended his hand to the elder and made a short speech. The group then indicated that they desired to have Shepard as their pastor and would proceed to his ordination unless there were objections. There were no objections and the ordination ceremony was carried out.

Several months later, February 1, 1636, Richard Mather and others attempted to form a church at Dorchester to take the place of the one that had moved to Connecticut, but the proceedings did not go off as smoothly as in the case of Shepard's group because of a lack of understanding of what was expected in their relations to the assembly. Winthrop informs us that the group met for purposes of forming a church. Their confessions of faith were deemed acceptable, but when they attempted to "manifest the work of God's grace in themselves"[30] only Mather and one other person were thought to have an adequate report to make. The result was that the formation of the church had to be postponed until September when the persons involved were able to make a more acceptable relation of their conversion experiences. These incidents seem to confirm the idea that the practice of making a public recital of their conversion experience was new and unfamiliar to the bulk of the new arrivals.

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[29] John Winthrop, The History of New England from 1630 to 1649, 2 vols. New Edition, James Savage, editor (Boston, 1853), I, 215.

The procedure followed in admitting members to the Boston church is given by Thomas Lechford and is significant because of the position of leadership which that church had and because it reveals something of John Cotton's practice. Lechford wrote as a hostile critic, but in the main his account seems to be in agreement with what was known and certainly shows the impression which an outsider had of the system. Lechford was a lawyer who attempted to practice law in Boston between 1638 and 1641 and attempted to join the church there without success.

Lechford stated that the person desiring membership contacted one of the elders privately and made known his desire to join the church. He was then asked "if he be willing to make known unto them the work of grace upon their souls or how God hath been dealing with them about their conversion."[31] If the answer was in the affirmative a private meeting was called in which, however, there were usually a considerable number of both men and women of the church present in addition to the officers of the church. The relation of their conversion experience was then given. He noted that at Boston the men usually stood while giving this, but the women customarily remained seated for their presentation.

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[30] Ibid., I, 219.

Lechford sarcastically tells us what was expected from the candidates who are successful. They had to satisfy the assembled auditors that "they are true believers, that they have been wounded in their hearts for their original sin."[32] They had to "pitch upon some promise of free grace in the Scripture, for the ground of their faith,"[33] and they had to "find their hearts drawn to believe in Christ Jesus for their justification."[34] They had to be able to indicate what means was used to bring this about such as preaching, reading the Bible or other spiritual exercises. Finally they had to "know competently the sum of Christian faith."[35] After all of this has been gone through the auditors were given opportunity to speak either for or against the candidate, and if any offense was revealed satisfaction must be given on the principle of private satisfaction for a private offense and public for public.

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[31] Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing, or News from New England (London, 1642), p. 5.

[32] Ibid., p. 5.

[33] Loc. cit.

[34] Loc. cit.

[35] Loc. cit.

If the candidate successfully passed the first more or less private phase of the procedure, he was then later referred to the entire congregation in a public meeting where opportunity was given for any statements of objection to the individual's admission. If none were forthcoming several of the brethren spoke in behalf of the candidate, and he was asked "to make known to the congregation the work of grace upon his soul."[36] Lechford said that the average length of time for this statement was one quarter-hour. The practice was for the men to speak for themselves, but at Boston the woman's confession was read for her by the pastor. He reported that at Salem the women spoke for themselves and as a new development they did it on week days rather than at a Sabbath meeting. Following the relation of experience a profession of faith was given either by means of questions and answers or by means of another speech. The professi[illegible] was expected to cover the major Christian doctrines and church polity with specific emphasis placed on the church officers which were recognized by the Congregationalists. Deviation from this emphasis on the church officers was sufficiently noteworthy for Lechford to comment on it in the case of John Knowles, pastor at Watertown, who joined the Boston church and yet "never made any mention in his profession of faith, of any officers of the church in particular, or their duties, and yet was received"[37] to membership.

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[36] Ibid., p. 7.

After the relation of experience and profession of faith the elder asked the congregation if they were satisfied, and Lechford's wry comment was that often someone was not; however if they were all satisfied the congregation voted by the raised right hand to accept the candidate. The entire procedure was then repeated with the next candidate, and sometimes almost an entire afternoon was consumed in the process. After all of the candidates had been processed they were called by name, and the church covenant was read to them. They indicated their agreement with it, and the elder promised the church's part of the covenant. They were then ready for the Lord's Supper and could have their children baptized.

Lechford's testimony is that the determination was completely equalitarian. Sometimes the master was received and the servant rejected, the husband and not the wife, the parent and not the child, or the converse of these cases might be just as common. This making of relations and joining the church was such an ordeal that bashful folk would rather "go without communion, than undergo such public confessions and trials."[38] That the rigors of this admission ritual helped to guarantee the purity of the churches can be little doubted, and that it tended to restrict the membership of the churches seems quite obvious also.

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[37] Ibid., p. 10.

[38] Ibid., p. 7.

Considerable impetus was given to the practice of relations by Thomas Shepard and his stress on the need for inner emotional turmoil which he considered an absolutely essential concomittant of a valid conversion. Shepard gave a lengthy account of his own experience in his Memoirs. There he told of a long and bitter struggle characterized by great searching of soul, doubts, rebellion and ups and downs climaxed by the great spiritual victory of conversion. Shepard wrote The Sound Believer: A Treatise of Evangelical Conversion and The Sincere Convert: Discovering the Small Number of True Believers and the Great Difficulty of Saving Conversion for the purpose of laying down steps and rules for the process of conversion. Shepard suggested that as there were four ways man ruins himself, so likewise there were four steps in his reclamation from his lost estate. He said that "the first act or stroke is conviction of sin. The second is compunction for sin. The third is humiliation or self-abasement. The fourth is faith."[39] Shepard insisted that "there can be no faith without a sense of sin and misery,"[40] and conviction of sin was listed as a work of the understanding whereas compunction involves the affections and the will. He laid down eight rules concerning compunction and insisted that there must be a sense of sin or misery with it. The work of Christ in compunction was to let into the heart of the sinner "a marvelous fear and terror of the dire displeasure of God, of death, and hell."[41] The heart of the sinner having been broken by compunction the third step was humiliation in which the sinner realizes his helpless and hopeless condition and seeks for help from Christ. The fourth step was faith itself which Shepard described as more of an action than a substance or entity.

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[39] Thomas Shepard, The Sound Believer: A Treatise of Evangelical Conversion (London, 1649), p. 4.

[40] Ibid., p. 7.

[41] Ibid., p. 66.

Shepard insisted that all converts must have a very deep sorrow for sin; however he recognized that this sorrow may be genuine without an extravagant external emotional display: "Nor yet do I press a necessity of tears or violent and tumultous complaints; the deepest sorrows run with least noise."[42] In this regard he shows a much more subdued approach than the later revivalism which in many cases stressed an external emotional display as the criteria for a valid conversion experience. With Shepard the real struggle is in private and not in public, but nevertheless it is a prolonged and violent emotional upheaval. He said that "it is easy to drop a tear or two, and be sermon sick; but to have a heart rent for sin, and from sin, this is true humiliation, and this is hard,"[43] so hard in fact that "those that are saved are very few; and those that are saved, are saved with very much difficulty."[44] Faith, the end action of his steps in conversion, was considered a very costly result. He said, "precious things cost much . . . if thy faith be so, it hath cost thee many a prayer, many a sob, many a salt tear."[45]

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[42] Ibid., p. 79.

[43] Thomas Shepard, The Sincere Convert: Discovering the Small Number of True Believers and the Great Difficulty of Saving Conversion (London, 1664), p. 100.

[44] Ibid, p. 84.

[45] Ibid., p. 178.

Although Shepard probably laid as much stress on the practice of relations as any of the ministers, his motive appears to have been an intense interest in religious experience rather than a quest for the ideal of a pure church. He took much the same position as Calvin in regard to the purity of the church. He acknowledged that their churches would not always be made up of "angels and saints, but [would be] mixt with many chaffy hypocrits, and of at times prophane persons."[46]

Although the institution of relations was fundamental in New England ecclesiology only comparatively few samples of these have survived. The main source is from the pen of Thomas Shepard whose intense interest in the conversion process led him to write up the related conversion experience of fifty people who were received into the Cambridge church during his ministry. The work is entitled "The Confessions of Diverse Propounded to be Received and Were Entertained as Members."[47] It is a report rather than the actual words of the professors. Another source is the unpublished records of the Wenham church under John Fiske (pastor 1644-1656) which contains over twenty of these relations.[48] The general practice was for women to write out their account, and one of these dating from 1744 has been preserved.[49] Emotional involvement and soul-torment is evident in these accounts which can hardly convey much of the impression which the actual flesh and blood narration must have made on the hearers.

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[46] Thomas Shepard, The Church-Membership of Children and Their Right to Baptism (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1663), p. 14.

[47] This was never published. The manuscript is in the library of the New England Historic and Genealogical Society. The first confession of the series has been published in Lucius R. Paige, History of Cambridge, Massachusetts 1630-1877 with a Genealogical Register (Boston, 1877), pp. 252-253. The text is given in Appendix A of this dissertation.

[48] See note concerning this and the general subject of extant relations in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), p. 107, n. 3.

John Eliot's Indian converts were required to give detailed statements concerning their conversion experience before they were allowed to form churches of their own, and it appears that they were held to rather rigid standards of spiritual experience and theological knowledge.[50]

Variations in practice and modifications of its severity are evident also. In 1644, Thomas Welde wrote concerning the practice when he had been pastor at Roxbury (1632-1641) that a person was accepted if he could manifest any evidence of possession of Christ, and also that they did not require unanimous consent from the congregation. Unless objectors could convince the main body of the church of the validity of their objections they would, by sort of a gentlemen's agreement, abstain from voting rather than to vote against the individual propounded for membership.[51]

The records of Plymouth church give considerable insight into their admission policies. In 1669, it was noted that twenty-seven persons had joined the church that year, and a few comments are made concerning the practice followed in accepting persons for membership. After candidates had been examined in private by the elders of the church they stood propounded for two or three weeks, and then the men made an oral confession of their faith and a declaration of their experience of grace before the entire congregation. Women wrote out a relation of their spiritual experience. This was read to the congregation by the pastor with the elders giving testimony that their examination showed that the woman was qualified for membership. Individuals who came to the Plymouth church by transfer of membership were accepted on the basis of their letter of dismissal without further requirements.[52]

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[49] See Appendix B for the text of this "relation."

[50] See John Eliot, "The Examination of the Indians at Roxbury the 13th Day of the 4th Month, 1654," Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Series 3. IV, 217-260, 277-287.

[51] See Thomas Welde, An Answer to W. R. His Narration of the Opinions and Practices of the Churches Lately Erected in New England (London, 1644), pp. 18, 22.

From time to time modifications and exceptions were made, and the trend was clearly toward a less severe standard. In 1677 it was noted that "the church condescended so far as to take in private the relation of Samuel Cutbert, and the Elder the next Sabbath declaring some part of it in the public congregation, he was admitted to full communion."[53]

By 1688 certain difficulties demanded attention, and it was noted that some men who desired to join in churchfellowship "were bashful and of low voices and therefore not able to speak in public to the edification of the congregation nor to the hearing of the whole church who should be satisfied before they vote for their admission."[54] After considerable discussion the conclusion was that those who could should make a public relation but for those who could not the church should be called together in private to hear their account, but the voting for admission and the covenanting should still be done in public. Some suggested that the elders should narrate the candidates' private statements to the public meeting so that all might be edified by it. It was decided to leave the matter for the elders to decide on the basis of each individual case.

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[52] Plymouth Church Records, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 145.

[53] Ibid., I, 154.

[54] Ibid., I, 163.

As might be expected objections to the general severity of the tests for church membership were heard on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the most vociferous critics was the Scottish Presbyterian leader, Robert Baillie. He wrote against the Independents in general and those of New England in particular. He distinguished between the Brownists and the Independents and complained that although the Brownists were satisfied with convincing signs of conversion given before the public assembly, the Independents went even further and subjected the candidate to an ordeal which really was more of a trial of their patience and amiability of disposition than a test of their faith. He affirmed that the requirements of the Independents that the candidate prove his regeneration by such convincing evidence was "the great partition wall . . . the capital and fundamental difference, the only cause of their separation from us."[55] This statement obviously overlooked the fundamental difference of church polity, but it showed one of the foremost dividing issues.

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[55] Robert Baillie, A Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time . . . (London, 1645), p. 155. See also discussion on pp. 22, 106. Sometimes Baillie equates the Independents and Brownists and sometimes he distinguishes between them.

Needless to say there were dissenters in New England who opposed the practice and from time to time offered their protest. Those who were Presbyterians or inclined toward Presbyterianism opposed it, and those, such as Thomas Lechford, who were kept out of church membership because of the requirement likewise opposed the practice of relations as did all others who were not enthusiastic Congregationalists. In 1638, a Mrs. Thomas Oliver of Salem was committed to jail as a dangerous person because she objected to "not being admitted to the Lord's Supper without giving public satisfaction to the church of her faith."[56] In 1644, two churches were scheduled to be gathered, one at Andover and one at Haverhill, but they were turned down because most of the prospective members refused "to declare how God had carried on the work of grace in them"[57] giving as their reason for refusal the fact that they had previously done so when they were admitted to their former churches. The next year these churches were organized however. These incidents show the insistence of the authorities on the observance of the practice, and also that some of the people were not particularly enthusiastic about it. The case of Dr. Child's petition in 1646 can be cited as another protest against this practice. When the Massachusetts Court answered the charges of the Child petition they defended their requirement of a public profession by claiming that it was expressly required by a number of Scripture references.[58]

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[56] John Winthrop, History of New England (Boston, 1853) I, 339.

[57] Ibid., II, 238.

A number of purposes can be cited as motivating factors in the development of the stress on a relation of the conversion experience. The goal of securing a pure church has already been cited as fundamental to the New England ecclesiology, and arising out of this was the development of the practice as a means of emotional satisfaction to the members of the church. Another motive was that of supplying a tool for evangelism. The thinking behind this being that if the trial of the individual's conversion experience showed it to be defective, means could be used to bring about his real conversion. Concerning those who might fail to pass the test Welde said "its better for such to be discovered here, than hereafter, to their eternal ruin."[59]

Another motivating factor which is really part of the pure church concept was the desire to "fence the Lord's Table" as it is called in the theological writings of the Congregationalists. This involved the matter of excluding not only the unregenerate but also those who were considered as not sufficiently mature in spiritual matters to run the risk of partaking of the sacrament unworthily and thus incurring the judgments proclaimed by the Scripture for this act. Further treatment of this aspect will be given as a motivating factor behind the Half-Way Covenant.

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[58] Thomas Hutchinson , A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), p. 215.

[59] Thomas Welde, An Answer to W. R. (London, 1644), p. 22.

A considerable number of effects of the practice of relations on New England life can be suggested. Depending upon one's point of reference, some of them can be considered as good and some of them as probably doing more harm than good in their social context. In the psychological realm it can be suggested that the practice did give those that qualified under it real emotional benefits. Not only did they receive strong assurance of their salvation and membership in the elect, but they also received much needed assurance that their hardships and privations were worthwhile as they listened to the account of the great spiritual benefit which others received in the society made possible by their efforts. On the negative side it may be said that if satisfaction was the lot of those who qualified, frustration and torment must have been the lot of the one who failed. The law compelled him to attend church, the mores of his society, the preaching of the pastors, the teaching of the teachers, the urging of his parents, peers, family and friends all demanded that he have an emotional experience which he could not muster. In a church-oriented society he must remain an outsider to many of the satisfying experiences of that society.

In the economic sphere real sanctions were employed against the non-qualifying if we can accept Lechford's statement as indicative of the norm. He complained that he was "kept from all place of employment or preferment"[60] because of his inability to satisfy the demands for church membership.

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[60] Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing (London, 1642), p. 73.

Politically the requirement for an experience had far-reaching implications because of its leveling tendency which "seemed to place hereditary influence at the mercy of the conversion experience,"[61] and this caused the nobility for the most part to refrain from migrating to New England. The correspondence between John Cotton and Lord Say and Seal, who was contemplating migrating to Massachusetts Bay in 1636, clearly shows concern on this point. It may have had the effect of limiting the pool of traditional leadership and hence have helped to develop other sources, and it also may have augmented the democratic impulses inherent in the institutions of Congregationalism.

The ecclesiastical effects of the practice are for the most part much more tangible. In some few cases such as the churches at Dover and at Newbury the requirement was simply ignored for a time by the pastors who opposed it, and thus helped to create confusion in the church life of the early colonists.

Of considerable importance to both the political and church life of the colonies was the practical effect of excluding considerable numbers of persons from church membership and hence from the discipline of the church. Lechford's estimate[62] that three-fourths of the inhabitants were excluded from church membership certainly seems an exaggeration. John Cotton emphatically denied its validity "even if he is thinking of those who live more than a score of miles from any church."[63] Richard Mather indicated that he was uncertain as to whether the church members were a majority of the inhabitants of all New England, but he emphatically asserted that in Massachusetts Bay the heads of households were overwhelmingly church members.[64]

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[61] Alan Simpson, Puritanism (Chicago, 1955), p. 31. Simpson's discussion is based upon the "Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the year 1636," Thomas Hutchinson, History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 3 vols. Lawrence Shaw Mayo, editor (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936), I, 414-417.

[62] Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing (London, 1642), p. 73.

One of the fundamental effects was that of producing or at least helping to produce a shift in the basic orientation of the theology of New England Puritanism. This shift[65] was from a doxological to a soteriological emphasis in preaching and writing. The soteriological emphasis seems to have reached the peak of its logical development in Solomon Stoddard, and then in Jonathan Edwards there is an attempt to harmonize the two concepts in a balanced practice and theory.

The change from an ecclesiology dedicated to manifesting the glory of God to one where the controlling principle was the salvation of souls is usually attributed to the development of Covenant theology in New England. This may very well be the case, but it seems to this writer that the real cause is to be found in the great stress placed on religious experience and then the use of means to bring about this experience. One of the means used with great and increasing vigor was the stress on the covenant relation as a means to bring the children of the church to the point where they realized the covenant promises in their own experience.

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[63] John Cotton, The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared (London, 1648), Part I, p. 72.

[64] Richard Mather, Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed (London, 1643), p. 7.

[65] For a brief but suggestive treatment of this shift see Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," Church History, XXV (June, 1956), 136-144. See especially p. 142.

The effect most pertinent to this study was that of creating a virtually insoluble problem when the matter of the continuity of the church came into direct conflict with the test of experience for church membership.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF CONTINUITY

Every group is faced with the question of continuity. Ordinarily it is not a vital problem, but if the group is tied to a high ideal it is bound to have the problem of perpetuating both itself and the ideal. The higher the standards of membership the greater the problem of recruitment, and if the ideal is in the realm of moral and spiritual values the difficulties are intensified.

New England theology created its difficulty for itself when it superimposed upon its basic Covenant theology, with its theory of continuity, a test for church membership which was originally designed, it seems, to guarantee the ideal of a pure church. This test required that an individual seeking church membership be able to recount an experience of conversion that was sufficiently credible to convince not only the minister and the elders but also most of the voting congregation that he had undergone a conversion experience which they felt perfectly competent to evaluate on the basis of their own experiential knowledge. The problem became acute for the Puritan pioneers when their children and grandchildren were not able to muster the required experience.

Other Protestant groups were able to avoid the difficulty which plagued New England Congregationalism by modifying in some way the troublesome theological aspects. The Anabaptists avoided the difficulty by rejecting the theory of continuity and by a less rigorous test for determining fitness for church membership. This membership eligibility was determined by a confession of faith and affirmation of an adult conversion experience without public recital of the details. The individual submitted to the rite of adult baptism by immersion and thus entered into at least an implicit covenant. Calvin, the Presbyterians and other Reformed groups, although fully committed to the principle of continuity in Covenant theology, avoided the difficulty of succession by sacrificing something of the ideal of a pure church for the more realistic principle of accepting a candidate on the basis of his profession of faith and a credible life. The original Plymouth and Salem groups as well as English Congregationalism in general followed the same pattern and avoided the pitfall.

One of the most firmly held beliefs of Puritanism was the belief in the covenantal relationship between God and his elect. Sometimes the contract-covenant principle was stressed as in Tyndale, and sometimes the continuity of the covenant principle was stressed as in Calvin. The incompatibility of the two systems produced tensions and differences which added considerable fuel to the Half-Way Covenant controversy in America where both factors were prominent.

The theory of continuity was mainly based on the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 17:7 where it is recorded that God said to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant between me and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." Puritan theologians linked this with the promises of Romans 4:16, Galations 3:7, and above all the promise of Galations 3:29:

"If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs by promise." These texts were taken as guiding precepts to be used in unfolding the Bible and its plan of salvation and to show the relationship which existed between the absolutely sovereign God and his creatures. The concept is preeminently a Biblical one and for that reason appears in varying degrees in virtually all Christian thought. What seems to have been stressed in New England Puritanism was the practical application of this doctrine. Not only was it used as a means of comfort and assurance to the elect, but it was also used as a means of exhortation. Those inside the church and hence under the covenant were exhorted to perform deeds concomitant with their covenant relation, and those outside the covenant relation were exhorted to enter into the covenant and enjoy its blessings.

A word of caution may be in order concerning the interpretation of Covenant theology. Although they are frequently blended into one system, a distinction needs to be kept in mind between the early covenant beliefs and stress as found in English, Scotch and early American writers with their bent toward practical Biblical theology on the one side and the more speculative hypothetical Federal theology[1] of the Continental theologians such as Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and Herman Witsius (1636-1708) on the other side. The latter men postulated hypothetical extra-Biblical covenants within the economy of the Trinity in order to establish their system which is much more involved than the earlier theology of the Puritans.

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[1] For something of the difference between Covenant theology proper and Federal theology see under these headings in Everett F. Harrison, editor, Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1960), pp. 145 217-218. Theories of Hamartiology and Anthropology are a prominent feature of the Federal system.

The basic statement of Puritan Covenant theology is given in chapter seven of the Confession of the Westminster Assembly where it is affirmed that it has pleased God to express his condescension to man by means of covenants as follows:

> The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of Grace: wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.[2]

The Confession goes on to explain that there is only one covenant of grace even though it has two different dispensations-that under the Law and that under the Gospel. In Puritan thinking the promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:7 is the foremost statement of the covenant of grace as far as the continuity of the church is concerned.

In keeping with all of the rest of the Reformed churches the New England Puritans considered their children to be included in the covenant promise, and baptism was viewed as the seal of the covenant under the Gospel just as circumcision had been under the previous dispensation of the grace of

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[2] The Confession of Faith Together with the Larger and Lesser Catechisms, Composed by the Reverend Assembly of Divines Sitting at Westminster Presented to both Houses of Parliament, 2nd ed. (London, 1658), p. 26.

God. In Reformed theology the infant was baptized because he was considered already in the church by virtue of the covenant promise. This fundamental tenet must be fully recognized if one is to understand the prolonged agitation in New England which eventually led to the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant as an expedient to meet the demands of this deep-seated belief. Calvin emphatically asserted concerning infants of church members that "they do not become the sons of God through baptism, but because they are heirs of adoption, in virtue of the promise, therefore the Church admits them to baptism."[3]

Robert Browne[4] continued the doctrine that infants were to be baptized by virtue of their covenant relation, and John Robinson confirmed the doctrine as follows:

> Now followeth our main foundation, that 'as the infants of Abraham, and of the Israelites his posterity, were taken into the Church-covenant, or covenant of life and salvation . . . so are the infants of the faithful now, and to receive accordingly the seal of baptism.'[5]

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[3] Ioannis Calvin: Articuli a Facultate Sacrae Theologiae Parisiensi Determinati Super Materiis Fidei Nostrae Hodie Controversis Cum Antidoto (M. D. XLIV) in Corpus Reformatorum, XXXV, 8. The English translation is from Lewis Bevens Schrenck, The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant (New Haven, 1940), p. 9.

[4] A Book Which Showeth the Life and Manner of All True Christians (1582) in Albert Peel, editor, The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne (London, 1953), pp. 254-261.

[5] John Robinson, A Defence of the Doctrine Propounded by the Synod of Dort: Against John Murton and his Associates, in a Treatise Intitled: A Description What God. etc. with the Refutation of Their Answer to a Writing Touching Baptism, (1624), in Robert Ashton, editor, The Works of John Robinson Pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, 3 vols. (London, 1851), I, 431.

William Ames, addressing church members, said "your children are holy, for they are partakers of the same covenant and the same profession with their parents."[6]

New England Theologians vigorously reaffirmed the position of children in the church. One of the strongest statements relative to the permanence of the covenant relation is that given by George Phillips, pastor at Watertown, who wrote in 1645 concerning covenant members that:

> All that ever proceed from them continue in the same state, parents and children successively, so long as the Lord continues the course of his Dispensation; nor can any alteration befall them, whereby this estate is dissolved, but some apparent act of God breaking them off from him.[7]

John Norton, then minister at Ipswich, declared that "infants are born into the church and are members before baptism,"[8] and John Cotton affirmed, concerning church members, that "all their seed are holy by God's adoption (Rom. 9. 4) and so by their appropriation and relation unto God, till themselves do reject him."[9] The last part of Cotton's statement reflects what became the generally accepted rule among the Congregationalists, that is, that children were members of the church until they openly rejected their covenant position or were excommunicated. Using 1 Corinthians 7:14 as their text most New England churches insisted that at least one parent must be a member of the church before the child could be considered eligible for baptism.

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[6] William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, Drawn out of the Holy Scriptures, and the Interpreters Thereof, and Brought into Method (London, 1642), 1. 32. 12.

[7] A Reply to a Confutation of Some Grounds for Infant Baptism; as also, Concerning the Form of a Church Put Forth Against Me by One T. Lamb (London, 1645), p. 126.

[8] The Answer to the Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollinius, Pastor of the Church of Middelburg Looking Toward the Resolution of Certain Controversies Concerning Church Government Now Being Agitated in England. Translated from the Latin by Douglas Horton (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 49.

[9] The Grounds and Ends of the Baptism of the Children of the Faithful (London, 1647), p. 79.

Failure on the part of a parent to present a child for baptism was considered a breach of the church covenant[10] and was considered a grave offense because of the possible consequences. In 1656 one Thomas Gould was admonished by the Middlesex Court[11] for not having his child baptized and thus putting himself and his descendants in danger of divine judgment because of his disobedience. The Court cited as part of their admonition the case of Moses who narrowly escaped being slain by God for failing to have his son circumcised. This was a violation of the covenant agreement, and as circumcision stood in the same relation to Moses as baptism did to the New Englanders the potential danger was deemed comparable. The Plymouth Church Records[12] show that in the period 1666-1696 one hundred and seventy-eight members were admitted to membership and only fifteen of these received baptism at their admission. This tends to show the extent to which infant baptism was the norm.

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[10] Plymouth Church Records, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 380.

[11] Manuscript of Middlesex Records as cited in Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising Not Only Religious, but Also Moral, and Other Relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855, 1862), II, 151.

[12] I, 180.

New England theologians were careful, however, to limit the scope of the church membership of their children. They were members but not full members, in the covenant line but with limited status needing verification and augmentation. The exact status of children in the church has been a vexing problem to many Reformed theologians. so the Congregational theologians had to deal with a very common problem and one that seems to be inherent in their principle of the continuity of the covenant relationship. William Ames gave the following concerning the status of children of the church:

> Your children are holy. For they are partakers of the same covenant, and the same profession with their parents. Yet infants are not so perfect members of the church as they that can exercise acts of communion, or be admitted to partake of all the privileges thereof, unless there do first appear an increase of faith. But they are not to be excluded from those privileges which pertain to the beginning of faith and entrance into the church.[13]

The same idea but in blunter language is given by John Cotton whose affirmation was:

> We do not say that the children of believers are holy with that holiness which accompanieth regeneration and mortifieth original corruption, but only with that holiness whereby they are admitted to the means of grace with promise of efficacy to the elect seed and offers thereof to the rest, so far as to leave them without excuse.[14]

The most extensive formal treatment of the problem of the relationship of children to the church appears to be that of Thomas Shepard in his

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[13] William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity (London, 1642), 1. 32. 12-13.

[14] John Cotton, The Grounds and Ends of Baptism (London, 1647), p. 125.

Church Membership of Children and Their Right to Baptism. Shepard explained that there are two kinds of seed to be recognized: one is the elect seed and the other is the church seed. The church seed is the comprehensive term designating all the children of the church whereas the elect are the chosen ones of the seed. Corresponding to this concept of a double seed there is also a double aspect to the covenant. One part of the covenant is external and the other is internal. Because it is the covenant which makes the church there are two grades of membership within the church. The one is the elect seed and is inward, but the other corresponds to the church seed and is an outward membership only. With this in mind it is possible to explain their view of the covenant relation of children, and Shepard gave this explanation:

> Hence, therefore it is, that when we say, that children are in covenant, and so church-members the meaning is not that they are always in inward covenant and inward church members, who enjoy the inward and saving benefits of the covenant, but that they are in external and outward covenant, and therefore outwardly church members, to whom, belongs some outward privileges of the covenant for their inward and eternal good . . . . God may take them into outward covenant (which is sufficient to make them church-seed or members of the church) although he doth not receive them into inward covenant in bestowing upon them saving grace or power to profess it.[15]

Baptism was viewed as the seal which confirmed the fact that God had taken the church seed at least into outward covenant, and as a result he "reckons them among his people, and children within his visible church and kingdom, and that hereupon he will prune and cut, and dress, and water them, and improve the means of their eternal good upon them, which good, they shall have unless they refuse in resisting the means."[16] This concept allowed full play by the clergy in bringing to bear upon the children of the church all the means at their disposal, and at the same time placed the ultimate responsibility upon the individual.

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[15] Thomas Shepard, The Church Membership of Children and Their Right to Baptism (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1663), p. 2.

The New England Puritan belief in the covenant relationship of their children to the covenant of grace was complicated by two other cherished facets of their system. The first, as has already been pointed out, was their ideal of a pure church and the test of a recitation of experience to obtain this ideal. The second complicating factor was Congregationalism's insistence on the church covenant. Both of these items seemed to be essential to their system, and yet both seemed to interfere with their covenant theology and its theory of continuity.

It was agreed by virtually all of the Congregationalists that the means of constituting a visible church was the instrument of the church covenant. The basic Scripture text used to substantiate this principle seems to have been Matthew 18:19: "Again, verily I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree in earth upon any thing, whatsoever they shall desire, it shall be given them of my Father which is in heaven." The church covenant was the formal means of indicating their agreement and of establishing the channel for the heavenly blessing. Ames indicated that believers themselves did not make a particular chuch unless they were joined together by means of a special bond, and this special bond was the church covenant either express or implicit. [17]

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[16] Ibid., p. 6.

John Norton gave the following definition of the church covenant:

> The church covenant is one in which members of a particular church by a public and express (as distinguished from implicit) agreement and promise associate, unite, and bind themselves together to exercise the fear and sacred worship of God, the unity of the faith, brotherly love, mutual edification, and all the duties of piety in a holy communion with God and each other. [18]

Norton recognized the validity of an implicit covenant for the essence of a church but held that an express covenant was needed for better order and hence more desirable. In practice an express covenant was insisted upon in virtually every case.

The first New England church covenants were very brief in form. Following is the text of the Salem church covenant of 1629:

> We covenant with the Lord and one with another; and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his ways, according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed word of truth. [19]

This first church covenant in America (Plymouth church did not re-covenant when they came to Plymouth and the Mayflower Compact was a civil not an ecclesiastical covenant) closely parallels what Governor Bradford later reported as the essence of the Pilgrim covenant of 1602. When Hugh Peter arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1636 he apparently lengthened the church covenant into a document with considerable detail.[20]

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[17] William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity (London, 1642), 1. 32. 14-15.

[18] John Norton, The Answer (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), pp. 44-45.

[19] Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), p. 116. Daniel Appleton White, New England Congregationalism in Its Origin and Purity Illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject (Salem, 1861), p. 13.

A point of differing opinion among the ministers of New England was the relationship between the covenant of grace and the church covenant. Norton took a broader view of the problem than did most of his compatriots and insisted that the covenant of grace and the church covenant were not the same; however in the Preface to the same work in which Norton elaborated his views on this question, John Cotton indicated that he, along with Hooker, Davenport, Mather, Shepard and Allin, disagreed with a number of the views advanced. One that is specifically mentioned is Norton's "distinction between the covenant of grace and the church covenant."[21]

It is very evident that Norton was expressing a minority view, and that most of the early New England theologians virtually equated the two covenants as part of the same system; however it also seems fairly evident that Norton's views were actually more consonant with the tenets of Protestantism than those that disagreed with him on this point. Those who contradicted Norton's position were actually coming close to the view of no salvation outside of the visible church. The reason for opposition to Norton's position is, perhaps, that it would have tended to pose a threat in theory both to the theocratic ideal of which the church covenant was a part and to the ideal of a pure church. Norton's explanation of his position was that the church covenant was an external part of the covenant of grace and might include both the elect and the reprobate, but the covenant of grace included only the elect. He held that there were many in the church covenant who were not in the covenant of grace, and in some cases there were those who were in the covenant of grace but never in a church covenant. Baptism, however, could be administered only to those infants whose parents were in covenant.[22]

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[20] See Appendix C for the Salem covenant text as added to.

[21] John Norton, The Answer, p. 14.

The principle that parents must be in formal church membership relation before they could have their children baptized was affirmed by John Davenport in 1639 when he stated that "the children of godly and approved Christians are not to be baptized until their parents be set members of a congregation."[23] The same principle applied to the parents themselves in relation to eligibility for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. They were not to be admitted unless members in good standing of a Congregational church.

Once consummated the church covenant relation was considered permanent as long as the individual lived unless excommunicated or given a formal dismissal by the church. To violate this principle of formal dismissal was considered contrary to good order and the person was subject to admonition by the offended church.

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[22] Ibid., pp. 51-58, set forth Norton's opinions on these matters.

[23] John Davenport , An Answer of the Elders of the Several Churches in New England unto Nine Positions Sent Over to Them (By Divers Reverend and Godly Ministers in England) to Declare Their Judgments Therein. Written in the Year 1639 (London, 1643), p. 61.

Contrary to the organic unity suggested by Covenant theology with its insistence on the membership of children in the covenant was the fundamental insistence by the Congregationalists that the relation between each soul and his God by way of the covenant was strictly an individual matter and the relation must be established by the individual's free and voluntary action. The theory was presented by Norton whose suggestion was that "every relation between governed and governing among free men is based upon mutual consent publicly entered into, that is, by the method of the covenant."[24] Joining into church covenant was such an act of voluntary union, and as most of the ministers considered the church covenant and the covenant of grace component parts of the same whole, one could not be deemed a member of one without being a member of the other. The voluntary, individualistic nature of the relationship was greatly emphasized by Peter Bulkeley, teacher of the Concord church from 1637 to 1659, who declared that:

> God conveys his blessings only by covenant, and this covenant must every soul enter into, every particular soul must enter into a particular covenant with God; out of this way there is no life . . . . This must we do everyone of us for his own part, give up ourselves to the Lord, as a people in covenant with him.[25]

The great task of the New England Congregational system, if its continuity was to be preserved, was to insure that the elect among the church seed were transferred from their provisional status in the outward covenant to the assured status of the inward covenant, and the gate through which this took place was a credible conversion experience which confirmed that the individual was a visible saint and not just visibly in covenant. One of the main goals of the Puritan educational system was to prepare the child for this conversion experience.[26] The ministers exhorted for action concerning it, and the church teachers taught the need for it. A large body of conversion literature was developed, and spiritual exercises were suggested for fanning the embers of faith. Much introspection was encouraged as a stimulus to spiritual action.

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[24] John Norton, The Answer, p. 51.

[25] Peter Bulkeley, The Gospel Covenant; or the Covenant of Grace Opened, 2nd ed. (London, 1651), p. 47.

The individual who was able to attain the prescribed experience was propounded to the church for full membership, and upon his satisfactory relation of this experience was received into the church covenant with all of its duties and privileges.

But what of the individual who could not muster the needed experience of conversion, and what, in turn, of his children for whom he sought baptism? The system had no provision for such cases. The need for continuity demanded either a more realistic standard for admission to church membership and a more optimistic view of human nature which would give a basis for such a standard or a theory of efficacious sacraments which would make the process almost automatic. The Congregationalists had none of these until Stoddard, and so had to cast about for an acceptable solution to the problem. The solution finally adopted was that of the Half-Way Covenant which was the product of a long period of agitation and groping.

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[26] See discussion of this matter in E. S. Morgan, The Puritan Family (Boston, 1944), p. 47.

CHAPTER V

EARLY AGITATION

The Half-Way Covenant was an attempt to solve some fundamental problems which had agitated New England from the year 1633 onward. Added to problems inherent in their theological system was a constant agitation from the various divergent elements within their society both on political and theological grounds. Three main areas of difficulty can be cited. There was agitation for a lower standard of admission to church membership; there was constant pressure for an acceptable standard of admission to baptism for the infants of those who would not or could not meet the rigorous standard for church membership; and there was a constant current of opposition to the ministers both from the secularly minded part of the population and from the discordant theological elements within the Christian community.

Among the earliest of the problems which produced friction was the matter of the freemanship. According to the charter of the colony of Massachusetts Bay the governor or deputy-governor along with a committee of six of the eighteen assistants were given full power to extend the freemanship to those of their choice. With the freemanship went the power to hold office and elect officers and, apparently, to serve on juries. At a meeting of the General Court in October, 1630 there was what appears to have been a routine request for the freemanship on the part of one hundred and eight men, and in May of 1631 this was extended to one hundred and sixteen men who took the oath of freemanship. At the same time the Court ordered that in the future no one was to be admitted as a freeman who was not a member of a church.[1]

At the time the Massachusetts Court instituted this requirement it was not a particularly difficult one in view of the comparatively easy standard for church admission, but after the inauguration of the practice of a relation of experience in 1633 and the extension of this to a public relation in 1634, it became more and more a source of friction. Timid folks were hesitant to go through the ordeal and many others could not muster the required experience to qualify no matter how eminently qualified they might otherwise be. The principle of a limited franchise was augmented in March of 1635/36 with the provision that no new churches were to be formed without the express approval of the magistrates and the elders of the existing churches. No members of unapproved churches were to be admitted to the freemanship.[2]

That these limitations did produce friction and resentment seems fairly evident from Lechford's statements in this regard. He noted that none could vote or hold office or serve on any kind of a jury who were not church members and that most of the people were not church members. This, he thought, produced an element of injustice in their judicial system. He complained that "when they come to be tried there . . . they must be tried and judged too by those of the church, who are in a sort their adversaries."[3] To some extent at least the resentment against ecclesiastical power which seems to have been constantly smouldering in New England may be traceable to this combination of ecclesiastical and judicial power.

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[1] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 5 vols. Nathaniel Shurtleff, editor (Boston, 1853-1854), I, 87.

[2] Ibid., I, 168.

The opening round of the long drawn out conflict between the concepts of purity and continuity in the church began in 1634 in the Dorchester church of which John Warham was pastor. The Dorchester church was perplexed by the question of whether a grandfather who was a church member could claim baptism for his grandchild whose immediate parents were not church members. It should be noted that in this case the problem was one which had been transferred to America from England in the persons of the adult parents who were not church members As more and more children matured and had children of their own the problem increased and became more evident, but the roots of the problem were in the theory of continuity of the covenant. The breakdown came when the institution of relations was imposed upon the covenant theory.

The Dorchester church wrote to the Boston church for advice in the matter, and the Boston answer was written by John Cotton who asserted that the grandfather could claim the privilege of baptism for his grandchild with two conditions attached. The first was that the grandfather was to assume the responsibility for the child's religious education, and the second was that the parents were to continue to prepare themselves for qualification as church members. Cotton appealed to the nature of the covenant relation as the basis of his decision. Both the contract nature of the covenant and the promise element are cited. Cotton said that there was an obligation of the covenant on the part of both sides. God made the offer in Genesis 17:7 to the believer and to his seed, and in view of the fact that God had placed no limitations upon the seed in the covenant, the covenant obligations extended to many generations. The grandfather by his faith had met the obligations of the covenant and so could claim the benefits of the covenant not only for himself but for his descendants.[4] Cotton's view seems to indicate an extremely firm conviction in the continuity of the covenant relationship and a somewhat optimistic view of human nature.

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[3] Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing, or News from New England (London, 1642), p. 23.

The question which Cotton answered reflected a too deep-seated problem and elicited too much dissident opinion to be settled this easily and was destined to cause turmoil in New England theology for almost two hundred years. The Dorchester church moved to Windsor, Connecticut, in 1636, and a new church was formed at Dorchester with Richard Mather as pastor. He objected to Cotton's answer and rather sarcastically argued that if they went one degree beyond the next parents why not go all the way to Noah and take in everyone?[5] Thomas Hooker later emphatically asserted that the right to baptism extended only to the immediate parent and not to the grandparent.[6]

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[4] Cotton's letter is printed in Increase Mather, First Principles of New England Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Communion of Churches (Cambridge, 1675), p. 3.

[5] Richard Mather, Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed in an Answer of the Elders of the Several Churches in New England to Two and Thirty Questions, Sent Over to Them by Divers Ministers in England to Declare Their Judgments Therein (London, 1643), p. 22. Mather later changed his mind on this matter.

John Norton analyzed the dilemma facing the Congregationalists very well when he said "to cheat in doing the work of Jehovah or to neglect it is to break the law. But to baptize non-members is to cheat in doing this work."[7] The problem was that of determining whether the infants in question were truly members or not. Norton admitted their quandry and welcomed any constructive efforts to solve it.

It seems quite clear that the issue was heading for a showdown within the Congregational fold itself. The internal pressures for the more liberal policy of baptism were very great. There was the widespread and long standing custom of infant baptism within nearly all Christian groups except the Anabaptists, and there was the firm belief that baptism was a necessary rite to fulfill the covenant obligation. This was based on the firmly held analogy of circumcision. There was also the very deep-seated emotional involvement so aptly expressed by Nathaniel Ward:

> What a cruelty it is to divest children of that only external privilege which their heavenly father hath bequested them . . . what an inhumanity it is, to deprive parents of that comfort they may take from the baptism of their infants dying in their childhood.[8]

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[6] Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline (London, 1648), Book III, p. 13. Hooker claims to be in agreement with Calvin, Zanchy, Junius and Perkins on this point.

[7] John Norton, The Answer to the Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollinius, Pastor of the Church of Middelburg Looking Toward the Resolutions of Certain Controversies Concerning Church Government Now Being Agitated in England (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 58.

[8] Nathaniel Ward, The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America, ed. Lawrence C. Wroth (New York, 1937), p. 15.

Another development in the fateful year of 1634 which contributed to the general agitation of the period was the appointment of Roger Williams as pastor at Salem. Accounts of his activities come largely from his opponents who sought to discredit him, but he apparently laid great stress on the exclusion of the unregenerate from almost all activities of the church and civil society as well. Williams, according to Nathaniel Morton of Plymouth, taught that it was not lawful for an unregenerate man to take the oath of fidelity to the civil government, and it was not lawful "for a godly man to have communion either in family prayer or in an oath with such as they judge unregenerate."[9]

Much more serious because of the threat which it posed to both the status of the clergy and to a fundamental principle of the Puritans was the so-called Antinomian controversy which erupted in 1636 with Anne Hutchinson as the central figure. Antinomianism is a perennial problem in theology which has shown up from time to time since the days of the Apostle Paul. Luther had trouble with John Agricola and Cotton had trouble with Mrs. Hutchinson. There are frequently two avenues of approach which antinomianism may follow. One is characterized by a stress on salvation by grace alone and a rejection of the role of works and the Old Testament legal system, hence the name, in favor of the New Testament emphasis on grace. The other avenue sometimes followed in antinomianism is to reject all ideas of objective theological laws in favor of the individual's own subjective rules as ostensibly revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Anne Hutchinson seemed to represent a conjunction of both principles. Her views on New Testament grace might have served as a healthy corrective to the one-sided emphasis on the Old Testament so evident in New England Puritanism had she not launched an attack upon the clergy of the colony as preachers of the covenant of works rather than the covenant of grace. Coupled with this was another tenet completely incompatible with the doctrines of Puritanism. This was the teaching which later came to be known among the Quakers as the doctrine of the inner light. Anne Hutchinson boldly claimed direct revelation from God and affirmed that the Holy Spirit worked immediately rather than mediately through preparation upon the individual soul. She declared that it was the person of Christ rather than the word of Christ that the individual was to be concerned with. These teachings cut at the very heart of the Calvinistic and Puritan system which held to the theory of concursus or secondary causation as the ordinary governing principle of God. The Puritans recognized God's sovereign right to act in extraordinary fashion if he so chose, but they firmly believed that such occasions were very rare and that God ordinarily dealt with men according to prescribed rules laid down in the Bible as the rule of life and faith. They took as their guiding principle St. Paul's command that all things "be done honestly and by order."[10]

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[9] Nathaniel Morton, New England's Memorial. Howard J. Hall, editor (New York, 1937), p. 79. See also page 82 for a summary of Williams' "errors."

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[10] 1 Cor. 14:40.

The issue posed by Anne Hutchinson's teachings was that of objectivity versus subjectivity. The Puritans held that the Bible was an objective revelation of God's mind and will and that events and persons were to be objectively evaluated in relation to this revelation. Although it may on the surface seem to be a contradiction, this is one of the guiding principles back of their insistence on a conversion experience and a relation of that experience. The experience might seem to be quite subjective in nature, but it was to be objectively evaluated by the auditors in the light of the teaching of Scriptures and by their own experience in relation to those teachings. Mrs. Hutchinson's advocacy of direct revelation and the validity of subjective apprehension of truth without the need of any objective verification would have upset the entire Puritan system, and this helps to explain in part the decisiveness with which the leaders acted to supress the new doctrines. The threat has been summarized as follows:

> To accept her doctrine would mean the abandonment of the fundamental belief for which the Puritans had crossed the water-the belief that truth for man was to be found in the Bible. It would mean a complete change in their daily lives, in their church, and in their state.[11]

The principle source of information is A Short Story of the Rise, Reign, and Ruin of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines, that Infected the Churches of New England.[12] The work is anonymous, but it is usually attributed either to Thomas Welde or John Winthrop.

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[11] Edmund S. Morgan, "The Case Against Anne Hutchinson," The New England Quarterly, X (1937), 637.

[12] London, 1644.

The Preface points up the magnitude of the threat by claiming that "multitudes of men and women, church-members and others" were eager to embrace the new teaching. A synod was convened to counter the threat and met at Cambridge August 30, 1637. Three weeks were devoted to the problems. Thomas Hooker and Peter Bulkeley served as moderators. The synod drew up a listing of eighty-two errors then current and offered a refutation of each point. It is hard to believe that Mrs. Hutchinson was responsible for all or even a majority of these, but she was considered the ringleader at any rate.

A number of errors concerned problems that impinged on the problems of church membership and the church covenant. Error number thirteen suggested that there was a new birth under the covenant of works from which the soul had to be again converted.[13] There is no evidence linking this novel concept with the subsequent Half-Way Covenant controversy, but it does indicate an intermediate stage between the unregenerate and the regenerate which is in some respects similar to the later idea of a limited church membership and also with Solomon Stoddard's concept of gradations in the natural and unregenerate states.

There is considerable emphasis in the errors on immediate revelation and denial of the role of means in conversion. The eighteenth error declared that it was only in hypocrites that the spirit worked by "gifts and graces,"[14] but in the true children of God the spirit worked immediately. The fortieth error declared that "there is a testimony of the spirit and voice unto the soul merely immediately, without any respect unto, or concurrence with the word."[15] These concepts rejected the whole doctrine of the means of grace, which was so prominent in Puritan and Reformed theology, and eliminated any objective standard of evaluation.

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[13] [John Winthrop?] . A Short Story (London, 1644), p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 4.

A number of the errors were aimed directly at the New England practice of examining a candidate to determine if he had evidences of the work of grace in his soul. One affirmed that "nothing but Christ is an evidence of my good estate,"[16] and another declared that "the seal of the Spirit is limited only to the immediate witness of the Spirit, and doth never witness to any work of grace."[17] Thus the practice of probing for objective signs of the work of the Spirit was ruled to be impossible. Thomas Shepard summarized the situation very well when he said that the main proposition of the Antinomians was "that a Christian should not take any evidence of God's special grace and love toward him by the sight of any graces. . . but it must be . . . by immediate revelation in an absolute promise."[18]

Another closely related practice which was attacked was that of looking for signs of sanctification in the life of the individual seeking church membership. The Biblical concept of stressing good conversation or manner of life is found throughout Puritanism, and yet it too was rejected as a test for validity of sainthood. The errorists are charged with asserting that "the church in admitting members is not to look to holiness of life, or testimony of the same,"[19] and claiming that "a man cannot evidence his justification by his sanctification."[20]

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[15] Ibid., p. 10.

[16] Ibid., p. 11.

[17] Ibid., p. 11.

[18] Thomas Shepard, "Thomas Shepard's Memoir of Himself," in Alexander Young, editor, Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay from 1623-1636 (Boston, 1846), p. 546.

The crowning insult of all the reported beliefs of the errorists was a frontal attack on the precious church covenant principle itself. This is voiced in the declaration that "all verball covenants, or covenants expressed in words as church covenant, vows, etc. are covenants of works, and such as strike men off from Christ."[21] Here was an attack on virtually every church and minister in New England and a denial of their basic constitutive device. Such a threat could hardly be tolerated if their system was to continue functioning. Even the Anabaptists did not attack the church covenant principle.

John Cotton's role in contributing to the controversy is very hard to determine. Anne Hutchinson was one of his devoted parishioners, and some of her tenets could have been derived from his teaching. There is evident in the sermons and writings of Cotton a stress on the work of the Holy Spirit and on the grace of God which could easily have been misconstrued and wrongly emphasized. At the same time there was evident in Cotton's practice and teaching a strong emphasis on the role of experience and the public relation and evaluation of that experience. There was also most decidedly a firm committal to the church covenant principle. The extent to which Cotton was willing to go to defend Anne Hutchinson is hard to explain unless there was a strong bond of personal attachment between them or the recorder of her views has mislead us concerning what she actually taught. At any rate the authorities of Massachusetts Bay met the Antinomian threat firmly and set the precedent of calling a synod of the ecclesiastical leaders for the purpose of solving their problems.

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[19] [John Winthrop?], _A Short Story_, p. 14.

[20] _Ibid._, p. 15.

[21] Ibid., p. 16.

The anti-ministerial sentiment which also contributed to the general ferment of the period was fanned in March of 1642/43 when support of the ministers in many churches of Massachusetts was changed from the system of voluntary contributions to support by taxation. Hubbard[22] noted that the change was disliked by some and considerable opposition was stirred up in the colony. The change was caused by the scarcity of money and general economic stringency which resulted from the greatly decreased flow of immigrants from England with their money and demand for goods and services. The English influx was nearly stopped by the start of the Long Parliament and the Civil War which gave the Puritans hope of practicing their principles in England itself.

Concurrent with the constantly increasing pressure within the Congregational fold for the baptism of those infants whose grandparents had been covenant members but whose immediate parents were not was a cross fire of gaining magnitude from the Presbyterians and the Anabaptists. The

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[22] William Hubbard, A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1848), p. 412.

Anabaptists, of course, militantly opposed the whole concept of infant baptism, and agitation from this group was a constantly increasing problem as more and more of them came to New England. Their presence was particularly vexing because the divided counsels of the Congregational ministers hindered their efforts to present a common front to the enemy. Roger Williams expressed sympathy with the new Anabaptist arrivals in 1639, and Winthrop noted activity on their part in 1641 and 1643. By 1644 the Anabaptists were producing considerable disorder, and it was deemed necessary for the Court to act against them. Hubbard[23] expressed his doubts as to the efficacy of the action and hinted that the Anabaptists received considerable sympathy from the people in general.

A favorite disrupting procedure of the Anabaptists who worshipped in the Congregational churches was to leave the service when the rite of infant baptism was about to be performed, and in New England this occurred nearly every Sabbath. The stir and commotion caused by their exit was a constant source of irritation and disorder in the worship services. Many incidents of this nature were recorded, and many court actions against the offenders. For example, in 1653 one Henry Felch was admonished by the Court for having left the worship service three times when the ordinance was about to be performed, and John Warren and Thomas Arnold of Middlesex were each fined twenty shillings for being absent four times from the ordinance of baptism.[24] Most disconcerting to the Congregationalist position was the action of President Dunster of Harvard College who resigned his position rather than recant his belief that the baptism of infants was unscriptural.

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[23] Ibid., p. 373. See also pp. 347, 413.

Considerable literary effort was prompted by the Anabaptist agitation. Among these efforts may be cited John Cotton's The Grounds and Ends of the Baptism of the Children of the Faithful which according to the Preface was written specifically to refute the Anabaptist beliefs. Nathaniel Ward's The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America also had much the same motivation.

Far more serious than the Anabaptist irritation was the threat to the entire Congregational system posed by the Presbyterians and Presbyterian sympathizers both in Old and New England. Whereas the Anabaptists derided infant baptism the Presbyterians demanded it as a matter of course for their children and also demanded church membership for themselves on their terms. The Anabaptists could only mount an annoying dissent, but for some time the Presbyterians had the potential of both ecclesiastical and political coercion. The rise and decline of Presbyterian power in England is very clearly reflected on the American scene where the differences between the two systems were most sharply defined. The points of difference were those of church polity and standards for admission to church membership. The latter was in turn the source of much difficulty in the matters of baptism of infants and partaking of the Lord's Supper.

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[24] Both cases are recorded in Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising Not Only Religious, but also Moral, and Other Relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855, 1862), II, 93. Felt records many other similar incidents.

There had been ample forewarning of difficulty between the Presbyterian and Congregational wings of Puritanism in the controversies which developed between devotees of the two systems during their exile in the Dutch Netherlands. The efforts of the Congregationalists to maintain a classis in the Netherlands during the years 1621-1635 produced a head-on clash with the Presbyterians there. The basic difficulty appears to have been over church polity, but different views concerning terms of admission to church membership and baptism were very effectively exploited by the Presbyterian party in securing the downfall of the Congregational classis and the scattering of their leaders.

The leader of the Presbyterian attack was John Paget, minister of the English church at Amsterdam. He successfully blocked in turn efforts on the part of the Congregational sympathizers in his church to secure Thomas Hooker and John Davenport as his associate pastor. Paget was able to discredit both Hooker and Davenport in the eyes of the English Privy Council and the Dutch Council of State, as well as the Dutch classis, by showing that they held schismatic views as to terms of church membership and admission to baptism. Paget secured the downfall of the Congregational classis in the Netherlands in 1635, and the effect of his efforts, particularly in the years 1630-1635, was to divert much of the Congregational stream from the Netherlands to New England. Many of the great Congregational leaders, such as Hooker, Davenport, Hugh Peter and William Ames were associated with the Dutch classis which the Presbyterians defeated.[25]

As early as 1633 John Winthrop expressed fear of the Presbyterian threat. In 1643 when the Westminster Assembly had begun its sessions he recorded the feeling of futility in New England as expressed by Thomas Hooker who had been invited to attend the Assembly and remarked that he "saw no merit in traveling 3,000 miles to agree with three men."[26] This was a glum reference to the overwhelming majority of Presbyterians in the Assembly and the uselessness of trying to stem the Presbyterian tide in England.

A general meeting of the ministers of the New England colonies was held at Cambridge in July of 1643 for the purpose of considering the Presbyterian threat in general and particularly the Newbury church where Thomas Parker, pastor, and James Noyes, teacher, were clearly Presbyterian in view.[27]

By 1645 the threat had become much more serious, and the situation was aggravated by the Hingham militia affair. This did not directly involve religious issues it seems but did involve its Presbyterian minded pastor, Peter Hobart, in a sharp conflict with the Massachusetts authorities. Winthrop noted that many books were being sent from England to New England in 1645. Some of them were in defense of Anabaptism, and some of them were "in maintenance of the Presbyterial government . . . against the congregational way, which was practiced here."[28] To counter this thrust a meeting of the elders from the churches of the United Colonies was called to meet at Cambridge July 1, 1645. Their principle action was an endorsement of Thomas Hooker's A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline as an answer to the attack by Samuel Rutherford, the Scotch Presbyterian, whose Due Right of Presbyteries was deemed a particularly serious threat to the New England churches. Hooker had the misfortune to have his book lost at sea, and it was not published until 1648 from an improvised manuscript.

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[25] The details of the struggle with the supporting documents are given in Raymond P. Stearns, Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands the Rise and Fall of the English Congregational Classis 1621-1635 (Chicago, 1940).

[26] John Winthrop, The History of New England from 1630 to 1649, 2 vols. New Edition, James Savage, editor (Boston, 1853), II, 92.

[27] See discussion of this meeting in Winthrop, History, II, 165 and Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), pp. 136-139.

In October of 1645 those opposed to the New England way began to plan concrete action by capitalizing on the Presbyterian ascendency in England. The first move was by William Vassall of Scituate who proposed to the Plymouth Court that full toleration be extended to all religious groups, but Governor Bradford refused to allow the proposition to come to a vote probably being very well aware of what was involved. Vassall apparently next prepared a petition to the Presbyterian controlled parliament of England in which he proposed the abolition of the existing civil and ecclesiastical structure of New England. One of the points of complaint according to Winthrop was that the petitioners were barred from the Lord's Supper and their children from baptism unless they were willing to meet the Congregationalists' requirements for church admission. This, they said, their consciences would not allow.

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[28] Winthrop, History, II, 304.

Vassall's preliminary feints at the Plymouth Court were followed by a formal challenge to the Massachusetts Bay system on the part of seven men of Massachusetts under the leadership of Dr. Robert Child who presented a remonstrance and petition to the Massachusetts General Court in May of 1646. Winthrop tells us that the Child petition was to the same effect as Vassall's but "much enlarged."[29] The main grievance of the petitioners was their exclusion from church membership. Many thousands, so they said, were barred from all political privileges, and their posterity were barred from the vital "seals of the covenant of pure grace."[30] They demanded that either those who were members of the church of England, meaning the Presbyterian, and of good life be admitted to the existing New England churches with full privileges or that they be allowed to establish their own churches. They bluntly warned that if denied they would appeal to Parliament which was then controlled by the Presbyterians.

The motives of the petitioners have been variously interpreted, and it is difficult to determine whether they were acting to secure redress from just grievances, part of a definite plot to subvert the New England system, or a combination of both. The latter seems to be closest to the probable answer.

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[29] Ibid., II, 320.

[30] [Thomas Hutchinson], A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), p. 193. This work contains the text of the Dr. Child petition.

The petitioners' grievances were very real, and they asked for what would be considered as the fundamental rights and desires of religious men. Their timing coincided with an extremely critical period for New England Congregationalism. Edward Johnson accused them of being mere opportunists who had acted "not that they cared for a Presbyterian church . . . but because they supposed that the Parliament in England would establish that way only."[31] A number of the petitioners were closely connected with some of the high placed Presbyterians in England, and this tends to indicate something of a conspiracy. A detailed study of the affair has concluded that Child was "an ardent Presbyterian, a disciple of Robert Baillie . . . [and that] the Remonstrance was in truth a party affair."[32] The Massachusetts Court evidently sensed a full-fledged conspiracy and countered it by levying stiff fines and imprisonment on the hapless petitioners whose English friends were not able to implement their plans.

Meeting at New Haven in September of 1646 the Commissioners of the United Colonies, with the exception of Plymouth, advised that "none be admitted as members of the body of Christ, but such as hold forth effectual calling . . . and those of whom Christ hath received and enter by express covenant."[33] They also recommended that baptism be limited to church members and their immediate offspring. The motivation back of this recommendation is rather hard to determine. Ostensibly it was aimed at suppressing the Anabaptists, Familists, and Antinomians, but the precepts were much more applicable to the Presbyterian agitators. The expression could also have been intended to influence the synod sitting at Cambridge to consider the same problems.

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[31] Edward Johnson, Wonder-working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England, J. Franklin Jameson, editor (New York, 1910), p. 240. See also Edward Winslow, Hypocrisie Unmasked (1646), pp. 99-100, for much the same opinion of the agitators.

[32] George Lyman Kittredge, "Dr. Robert Child the Remonstrant," in Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, XXI, 2, 3. Kittredge's conclusion has been rejected by Samuel Eliot Morison, Builders of the Bay Colony (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1930), p. 353.

The November session of the Massachusetts Court answered the Child petition in detail, and on the issue of church admission they rejected the Presbyterian plea and denied admission to all who refused to "give account of their faith or repentance."[34] The Court also directed that any person who "shall go about to destroy or disturb the order of the churches established in this country"[35] was to be fined forty shillings per month for as long as they continued in their perversity.

Concerning the ever-present thorny issue of the baptism of infants whose parents were not full church members the Court reserved judgment giving as their reason the fact that an assembly of elders had been called to deal with church problems, and they wanted to await their decision. The assembly referred to was the first session of the Cambridge Synod of 1648.

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[33] Acts of the Commissioners of the United Colonies of New England. David Pulsifer, editor (Boston, 1859), I, 81.

[34] [Hutchinson], Collection of Original Papers, p. 215.

[35] Records of Massachusetts Bay, II, 178.

The request for this synod had come from some of the Massachusetts ministers who had asked the May, 1646 meeting of the General Court to call such an assembly. The Court issued the call May 15, 1646, after considerable discussion which revealed a decided fear of synodical coercion on the part of the deputies. It seems quite probable that the order for a synod was issued prior to receipt of the Child petition because Winthrop indicated that the petition was received near the close of the session. The call was a result of the general agitation of the time and the Presbyterian threat of which the Child petition was a manifestation.

The call of the Massachusetts Court for a synod took notice of the differences of opinion and practice in their churches and observed that the chief point of difference was the matter of the proper subjects of baptism. Winthrop tells us that "the main and of the synod was propounded to be an agreement upon one uniform practice in all the churches."[36] The synod met September 1, 1646, with representatives present from all of the Massachusetts Bay churches except Boston, Salem, Hingham and Concord. Hingham was still smarting from the militia affair and Concord was not in a position to send representatives. Boston and Salem were opposed to the idea but finally cooperated. Twenty-seven of the twenty-nine churches in Massachusetts Bay eventually took part in the synod as well as representatives from some of the twenty-two churches of Plymouth, Connecticut and

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[36] Winthrop, History of New England, II, 323. See pp. 323-403 for many details of the Cambridge Synod.

New Haven colonies.[37]

The first session of the synod delegated to John Cotton of Boston, Richard Mather of Dorchester, and Ralph Partridge of Duxbury in Plymouth colony the task of each one preparing a "model of church government"[38] which were to be presented to the next session. They also directed that the results of their discussions were to be published.[39] These discussions centered around the power of the magistrates to interfere in religious matter, their right to call a religious assembly and the basis and power of a synod. The synod apparently did nothing concerning the vexing problems of baptism and church membership for which it had been called. The reason for the omission probably lies in the rise of a new problem which had not been anticipated. This was the challenge to their right of being which was manifested in both the stiff opposition of the deputies to calling a synod and in the opposition of the influential Boston and Salem churches.[40] The purpose of the synod was to establish uniformity of practice and before any hopes of accomplishing this could be entertained the group had to first establish its right and grounds of being. This they sought to do in their statement of results. This was not published until 1654 because of some mix-up in directions and so had a limited effect.

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[37] See discussion of the churches involved in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), pp. 173-174.

[38] Cotton Mather, Magnali Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1855), II, 211.

[39] [John Cotton?] , The Result of a Synod at Cambridge in New England, Anno 1646 (London, 1654) gives the results.

[40] The account of this opposition is given in Winthrop, History of New England, II, 323-332.

After about two weeks of discussion the synod adjourned to the eighth of June, 1647. They reconvened on schedule but were soon forced to adjourn again because of the outbreak of an epidemic which brought sickness to various members and cost the life of Thomas Hooker.

The failure of the first and second sessions of the Cambridge Synod to act on the twin problems of infant baptism and church membership left the question unsettled and the unrest continued with the pastors trying to cope with the problems and wishing that they had received some help in the difficulties.[41]

The energy and interest of the New England clergy seems to have been diverted somewhat by the matter of forming a confession of faith and church discipline. Such items were called for not only by the disorders and agitation in the colonies but also by the activities of the Westminster Assembly of Divines in England who first met July 1, 1643 and completed drafting their famed Confession December 4, 1646. It was not, however, formally adopted until June 20, 1648. Their activities seem to have stimulated parallel activity in America although New England leaders appear to have carefully avoided allusions to such an idea.

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[41] See letter to this effect by Henry Smith of Wethersfield under date of August 23, 1647 in Increase Mather, First Principles of New England (Cambridge, 1675), p. 24.

One of the earliest suggestions for the formulation of a statement of doctrine and practice seems to have come from Governor Endicott who wrote to the Commissioners of the United Colonies suggesting the advisability of such action. Under date of September 9, 1644, the Commissioners passed on the suggestion to the elders but did nothing to implement it. The Massachusetts Court under date of October 27, 1647, added to the duties of the Cambridge Synod that of framing "a confession of the faith we do profess touching the doctrinal part of religion."[42] To accomplish this they suggested the names of seven ministers who should each compose such a document.

The Cambridge Synod began its third and final session August 15, 1648, and lasted almost two weeks. According to Winthrop they confined their activities to the matter of formulating a confession of faith and a form of church discipline. In actuality the matter of formulating a confession of faith apparently involved no more than a discussion because the synod "wholly agreed with that which the assembly in England had lately set forth,"[43] and adopted it "for the substance thereof."[44] At the same time that the synod adopted the doctrinal part of the Westminster Confession they indicated their disapproval, as might be expected, with its form of church government and discipline. In line with this they adopted their own, and the Cambridge Platform is, as its title suggests, a platform of church discipline rather than a confession of faith. The Platform was chiefly based on the model submitted by Richard Mather with John Cotton writing the Preface to it. It was October 14, 1651, before the Massachusetts Court finally recommended the Platform to the churches, and even then fourteen of the forty deputies voted against it.[45] This vote reflects the continuing opposition on the part of many laymen to the principle of any kind of synodical action with the possibility of coercion no matter how firmly disavowed.

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[42] Records of Massachusetts Bay, II, 200.

[43] Winthrop, History of New England, II, 403.

[44] Preface to the Cambridge Platform in Walker, Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, p. 195.

The records of Plymouth, New Haven and Connecticut are silent concerning any action taken by these colonies relative to the Cambridge Platform which officially involved only the colony of Massachusetts Bay; however the Platform appears to have been quite generally accepted as a guide and expression of sentiments concerning matters of church polity. Some of its pronouncements on controversial matters were never heeded by some of the churches, and its failure to make pronouncements on others only prolonged the period of uncertainty as far as official positions were concerned. It is doubtful, however, if the course of controversy would have been much if any affected by a positive declaration on the points omitted. Such declarations may serve to reassure the uneasy ecclesiastical leaders but unless coercion can be applied such declarations do not change openly expressed opinions concerning emotionally packed issues nor do they force conformity.

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[45] Records of Massachusetts Bay, III, 240; IV, 57-58.

The Cambridge Platform made a number of pronouncements concerning some of the problems agitating New England and also omitted some others. Many of both categories were directly involved in the Half-Way Covenant controversy. Chapter one of the Platform asserted the importance of the church covenant principle, and chapter twelve dealt with the troublesome problem of the manner of admission to church membership. It emphatically reaffirmed the New England practice concerning admission to the visible church. The pronouncements of chapter twelve[46] are a good reflection of much New England thinking and practice in church matters. It is asserted that candidates "ought to be examined and tried first; whether they be fit and meet to be received into church-society or not." Repentance and faith were to be found in all members, and these were to be judged on the basis of "rational charity." The "weakest measure of faith" was to be accepted because "weak christians, if sincere, have the substance of that faith, repentance & holiness which is required in church members." In line with this thought "severity of examination" was to be avoided. Allowance was made for the timid or infirm who were "unable to make their personal relation of their spiritual estate in public." They were to be allowed to make the relation of their spiritual experience to the elders in private, and they in turn would make it for them to a public meeting of the church; however for persons who were able it was deemed "most expedient, that they make their relations & confessions personally with their own mouth."

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[46] The text of the Cambridge Platform of 1648 is given in Walker, Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, pp. 194-237.

Judgment was expressed concerning each class of persons who might seek admission to a particular church. Those who had never been "in Church-society" previously were required to follow the accepted procedure. If a person had been a member of a church and sought admission to another the same procedure could be required of them with full propriety but was not mandatory. Two classes of infants were recognized. There were those who were born into church membership by virtue of their parent's membership, and there were those who acquired church membership in their minority by reason of their parents having entered into covenant relation with God and his church subsequent to the birth of the children. Both classes enjoyed the same status.

On the exceedingly difficult and emotionally packed subject of the subsequent admission of these church children to the Lord's Supper the synod took such a firm and unequivocating stand that future agitation was virtually inevitable if the stand was adhered to strictly. The synod said that "it is requisite that these as well as others, should come to their trial and examination, and manifest their faith and repentance by an open profession thereof, before they are received to the Lord's Supper, and otherwise not to be admitted there unto." At the same time it was recognized that they had more privileges than non-members. They were in covenant with God, and they had baptism the seal of the covenant. They were in a more hopeful state of attaining salvation than non-members, and they were "under Church-watch, and consequently subject, to the reprehensions, admonitions, and censures thereof for their healing and amendment, as need shall require."

The thirteenth chapter of the Platform declared the principle that "the church cannot make a member no member but by excommunication." This dictum coupled with the declaration that the children of the church were members left unsolved the question of what to do with those who could not meet the requisite standard for full communion and yet were not guilty of any offense warranting excommunication. Likewise unformulated was anything relative to the matter of the proper subjects of baptism which the synod had originally been called upon to deal with in order to secure a uniformity of practice. Richard Mather's original draft submitted for consideration did contain a clear and definite statement relative to the proper subjects of baptism. It affirmed the following on the vital question:

> Such as are born in the ch[urch]: as members, though yet they be not found fit for the Lord's Supper, yet if they be not culpable of such scandals in conversation as do justly deserve ch[urch]: censures, it seemeth to us, when they are married and have children, those their children may be received to baptism.[47]

The same sentiments are expressed in the draft which Ralph Partridge of Duxbury submitted to the synod.[48]

The omission of this very important clause was later explained as follows:

> And in the synod held at Cambridge in the year 1648 that particular point of baptizing the children of such as were admitted members in minority, but not yet in full communion, was inserted in some of the draughts that were

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[47] *Ibid.*, p. 224, n. 3 quotes the manuscript.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

> prepared for that assembly, and was then debated and confirmed by the like arguments as we now use and was generally consented to; though because some few dissented, and there was not the like urgency of occasion for the present practice, it was not then put into the Platform that was after printed.[49]

Other sources indicate that the controversial statement was deleted because some very strong opposition threatened the harmony of the assembly. Cotton Mather stated that John Norton supported the view advocated by Richard Mather and Ralph Partridge but because of "the fierce oppositions of one eminent person"[50] he refrained from pushing the proposal in order to preserve peace. John Allin wrote in 1644 that Charles Chauncy knew very well "who it was that professed he would oppose it with all his might: by reason whereof, and the dissent of some few more, it was laid aside at that time."[51] It was much easier to pass over such a trouble-packed issue than it was to deal with it when the indications were that it would only engender more strife. The urgency of action was removed by the declining fortunes of the Presbyterians in England and the ascendency of Cromwell and the Independents with whom the New England Congregationalists had close ties. The Cambridge Synod had climaxed a long period of agitation. It had reaffirmed the validity of the church covenant principle, and it had likewise reaffirmed the prized formula for preserving the purity of the church. It had not solved the problem of continuity.

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[49] Ibid., p. 309.

[50] Mather, Magnalia, I, 291.

[51] John Allin, Animadversions Upon the Antisynodalia Americana (Cambridge, 1664), p. 5.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORMULATION OF THE HALF-WAY COVENANT: 1657

The Cambridge Synod of 1648 was able to avoid a showdown on the issue of baptism largely because of the removal of the external Presbyterian threat, but the New England churches could not hope for any period of ecclesiastical peace as long as there was a constantly increasing bloc of people who demanded baptism for their infants even though they could not meet the standards for church membership and communion. Their demands were vigorously opposed by many others who considered themselves defenders of the great ideal of the pure church.

Statements appear throughout the period 1648-1657 regarding the status of infants of parents not regarded as fit for full communion. It is evident that the topic was very much alive in Massachusetts Bay. In a letter of June, 1649, Thomas Shepard expressed himself emphatically concerning the position of church children. He argued that as the children of church members are members, in their infancy so are they members as adults and cannot be considered otherwise unless the church of which they are a member is dissolved, they are excommunicated, or they positively reject the Gospel. At the same time Shepard indicated that this was a limited membership, and it was limited by conditions: "Though they are members it follows not that they must come to the Lord's Supper, but they must first appear able to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body."[1] This concept of limited membership was later formalized in the Half-Way Covenant.

Richard Mather expressed his opinion in 1651 as to what the policy of the churches should be toward their children. His sentiments are very similar to those which the Assembly of 1657 and the Synod of 1662 adopted, and they may indicate something of his influence on New England church thinking. Mather's opinion was:

> The children of church members, submitting themselves to the discipline of Christ in the church, by an act of their own, when they are grown up to men's and women's estate, ought to be watched over as other members, and to have their infants baptized, but themselves not to be received to the Lord's Table, nor to voting in the church, till by the manifestation of faith and repentance, they shall prove themselves to be fit for the same.[2]

Mather indicated that his own church had not yet followed the practice which he advocated but were considering the matter and had written to other churches for their advice and indication of sentiment. This points up the role of Richard Mather in the long drawn out controversy over baptism of church children. He appears to have taken the lead in sounding out other ministers and amassing their opinions to be used in presenting the case for what became the Half-Way Covenant.

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[1] Preface to the Propositions Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Consociation of Churches, Collected and Confirmed out of the Word of God by a Synod of Elders and Messengers of the Churches in Massachusetts Colony in New-England (Cambridge, 1662) in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), p. 308.

[2] Quoted in Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising not only Religious, but also Moral and other Relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855, 1862) II, 49. See also Increase Mather, The First Principles of New England, Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Communion of Churches (Cambridge, 1675), p. 11.

Nathaniel Rogers of Ipswich replied to Mather's inquiry in 1652 and indicated full agreement with his position. He also expressed his belief that the past neglect of the children of the church was a major contributing cause to the "corruption and woeful defection of our youth."[3] Rogers stated that his church was having a meeting that very week, and he saw no alternative to quickly beginning the practice of baptizing the infants of the children of the church who could not qualify for full communion.

Agitation in the Salem church started in 1652 and was to continue for thirteen years before reasonable agreement could be reached as to a policy for baptizing infants.[4] Agitation on the subject started at Roxbury in 1653 and at Cambridge likewise. Jonathan Mitchell, the Cambridge minister, acknowledged that at that time he was still "in the dark"[5] as to what course to follow.

The seriousness of the problem in the New England churches was dramatically highlighted in 1654 when President Henry Dunster of Harvard College denied the whole concept of infant baptism, was forced to resign from his position, and was actually indicted for his actions in seeking to stop the ordinance of infant baptism at the Cambridge church. In connection with this action it was testified that Dunster had stated his opinion thus: "the subjects of baptism were visible, penitent, believers, and they only . . . . The covenant of Abraham is not a ground for baptism; no not after the institution thereof."[6] Dunster's declaration amounted to a complete rejection of Covenant theology and its scheme of continuity and could not be tolerated aside from complete capitulation to the Anabaptists. This was unthinkable, so Dunster had to be removed from his position of leadership. Cotton Mather suggested that one of the main effects of the Dunster affair was to stimulate Jonathan Mitchell into making a thorough investigation of the whole problem with the result, in turn, that he was able to lead the forces that approved the Half-Way Covenant in 1662.

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[3] Quoted in Increase Mather, First Principles, p. 23.

[4] Daniel Appleton White, New England Congregationalism in its Origin and Purity Illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject (Salem, 1861), pp. 60-62.

[5] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England from its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1855), II, 99.

John Norton led the forces that unseated Dunster and in the same year formulated some of the strongest theoretical arguments that have been presented for the baptismal rights of the children of the covenant. His basic position was that "children of parents in church covenant are church members and ought to be baptized."[7] They were to be baptized in their own right and not the right of their parents. For his support he appealed to the parallel status of Jewish children and their right to circumcision. His argument relative to degrees of membership and communion clearly pointed in the direction of the solutions of 1657 and 1662. He reasoned that members must be regarded in respect to communion and membership. He pointed out that there are degrees of communion with some persons more complete than others, but membership is a relationship and is not a matter of degree. A person either is a member, or he is not. Baptism is a sacrament of membership and not subject to degrees, but the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of communion and so subject to restrictions. Norton's argument concerning the continuity of covenant relationship was that "the child is contained in the parent only when he stands as a public person, not when he stands as a single person. Hence only the confederation, not the condition or conversation of the parent is imputed to the child."[8] It is deemed that ultimately the validity of membership does not depend upon the person who is the instrument of confederation but "upon the institution of God in Christ."[9]

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[6] Quoted in Lucius R. Paige, History of Cambridge, Massachusetts 1630-1877 with a Genealogical Register (Boston, 1877), p. 152.

[7] Increase Mather, First Principles, p. 15. In pages 15-20 Mather quotes extensively from Norton's manuscript on the subject.

His explanation of this shows the intricasies of Puritan thinking as well as the firmness of belief in the continuity of the covenant relation. Norton postulated a mediate and immediate, constituent and non-constituent membership. This might seem to involve a modification if not an outright contradiction to his earlier argument that membership is not a matter of degree, but here his reasoning seems to concern the matter of function rather than position. Norton's suggestion was that the male child who confederates mediately through the public person of his mother actually has a superior membership to that of the mother who confederates immediately in her own person. The basis of this argument is the widely held Puritan tenet that women are not capable of constituting a church, but this must be done by men. He goes so far here as to claim that if all the male members of a church were to die the surviving female members "would immediately cease to be church members."[10] In contrast to this the male child is considered a church member and capable of becoming a constituting member so that his membership is actually superior to that of his mother. But even though the mother's membership is inferior to that of her male child at the same time her position of communion may be such that she can partake of the Lord's Supper with her inferior membership whereas her male child with his superior membership cannot. The theoretical basis of the Half-Way Covenant may very well have had its origin in these statements of John Norton.

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[8] Ibid., p. 19.

[9] Ibid., p. 20.

It is fairly evident that from 1651 on, the Massachusetts Bay ministers, under the leadership of Richard Mather, were slowly building a case for the extension of the privilege of baptism to the children of those who had been born into a covenant relation but had never passed the experimental test for unqualified church membership. At the same time that the ministers were trying to build up their case they revealed considerable uneasiness concerning the idea and show extreme reluctance actually to begin the practice they so strongly advocated. In the meantime the incongruent elements of their theological system were becoming more and more troublesome as more and more children were being born to second generation parents who could not meet the standards demanded by the churches for admission. What was needed was for some respected minister to break with the traditional practice and actually start baptizing the infants in question rather than just talking about it or even voting to do it.

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[10] Ibid., p. 20.

When it came to practicing the baptism of the infants of these questionable second generation members Richard Mather appears to have had as much trouble as the rest of the ministers. Early in 1654/55 his Dorchester church attempted to deal with the problem. The church voted that members' children were to be regarded as members themselves, and their children in turn were to be baptized on the condition that their parents "take hold of their fathers covenant."[11] The congregation, however, was not able to agree as to just what this statement involved. The proceedings were further complicated when an examination of the candidates showed that they were neither fit to partake of the Lord's Supper nor to vote in church affairs. The congregation had such misgivings about the contemplated procedure that it was decided to write to the churches at Boston, Roxbury, Dedham and Braintree for their opinions in the matter. The answers were not favorable to the proposed practice. The Boston reply was signed by John Wilson and indicated that they had voted twice on the matter and asked Dorchester to forebear. The Dedham reply was signed by John Allen and said they could not go that far in their practice. John Eliot and Samuel

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[11] Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England 1636-1734, Arthur B. Ellis, editor (Boston, 1891), p. 164.

Danforth signed the Roxbury reply which stated that they had voted not to dissuade Dorchester but feared that the practice might "bring in time the corruption of Old England which we fled from.."[12] Apparently the Dorchester church proceeded no further in the matter because under date of 17-12-1655, the church was challenged as to why they were not doing their duty and baptizing the infants as voted by the church. In reply to this Richard Mather stated that two churches had indicated objections to the proposed practice. There is a rather enigmatic entry in the Dorchester records which might be construed as showing that an admission practice similar to that of the Half-Way Covenant's was started soon afterwards. The statement reads:

> 18 (3) 1656 the day above said was admitted into church fellowship. these persons underwritten upon occasion of different expressions used in the propounding of them, at first unto the churches considerations viz, that some were in some degree of membership more than other.[13]

Three persons were admitted under these terms which seem to indicate a modified admission practice although the statement hardly allows more than conjecture as to what was involved. The Dorchester church did not formally adopt the practices sanctioned by the Assembly of 1657 and the Synod of 1662 until 1677.

Other churches were taking action to liberalize their practice. Thomas Cobbett was installed as pastor of the church at Ipswich in 1656, and that same year the church passed a series of six resolves concerning the relationship of children to the church. These resolves included the provision that children of the church who were under fifteen years of age when their parents had taken the covenant could take the covenant when they became adults if their life was without offense. They could then have their children baptized; however the parents were barred from the Lord's Supper and voting in church affairs "unless they satisfy the reasonable charity of the elders of the church that they have a work of repentance and faith in them."[14] Apparently a public relation before the congregation was not to be required of these children of the church who took the covenant.

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[12] Ibid., p. 165.

[13] Ibid., p. 20. There are entries in the church records for 1662 and following showing admissions and dismissals of persons in full communion and some not in full communion. This would indicate a tacit use of the Half-Way Covenant principles.

In January of 1657 the Chelmsford church under John Fiske adopted a series of ten resolves very similar in intent though more detailed than the resolves passed by the Ipswich church. The Chelmsford resolves included the provision that "a confession of faith and a relation of the manner of God's working with their souls"[15] could be required of the church children before admitting them to the Lord's Supper if the church regarded it necessary. Eight days after the adoption of the resolutions the brethren of the Chelmsford church presented seventy-five of their children for baptism. These ranged in age from three weeks to twenty-three years. Both the number of children and their age range speak dramatically of the pent up demand for baptism and the pressures which were calling for a more liberal policy of baptism. It seems quite evident that by 1657, pressure had built up in the Massachusetts Bay colony to the point where decisive action was called for if there was to be any uniformity of practice and if the ministers were to be given some defense against the charge of innovation and apostacy from cherished ideals, which was being levelled at them by those who vigorously opposed any change in the policy of baptizing only children of full church members.

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[14] Quotation from the church records of Ipswich by John P. Cowels, "First Church in Ipswich," Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 333.

[15] John Fiske, "Notebook," Samuel A. Green, editor, in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Second Series, XXI (1897-1899), 328.

Intense as the issue was in Massachusetts, the call for formal action came from Connecticut rather than Massachusetts. Theological turmoil appears to have been much greater in Connecticut than in Massachusetts Bay. The Bay colony seems to have been able to attain a higher degree of ecclesiastical homogeneity than her neighbor. A number of suggestions can be made as to the possible reasons for this difference. The original migration from Massachusetts to Connecticut seems to have had some element of dissent in its motivation. The Massachusetts requirement of church membership as a requisite for the freemanship, which requirement Connecticut did not have, may have tended to produce less toleration but more uniformity. Probably the chief factor producing tension was the Connecticut tendency toward Presbyterianism which was to become more and more pronounced as time went on.[16] After 1650 the Connecticut Code of Laws made church attendance compulsory, and this probably produced considerable friction and discontent as the Presbyterians could not or would not meet the Congregational conditions for church membership. This situation was further aggravated in March of 1657, when the Connecticut Court ordered that there was to be no church or ministry attended by the inhabitants other than the established church unless the church should be approved by the Court and the neighboring churches as well.

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[16] See discussion concerning this in Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism (Philadelphia, 1949), pp. 15-16. In 1664 the English Commissioners reported concerning Connecticut that "here for the most part, they are rigid Presbyterians," [Thomas Hutchinson], A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay [Boston, 1769], p. 413.

The catalyst for much of the Connecticut agitation appears to have been a prolonged quarrel that rocked the Hartford church from 1653 to 1659. The causes of this quarrel have been investigated quite extensively but with varying suggestions as to its cause. The situation is complicated by the fact that the Hartford church also had another quarrel from 1666 to 1670, and some writers feel that the two quarrels have been confused by others. There is not much doubt but what the issue in the second quarrel was that of baptism, but this does not mean that the first quarrel could not have been on the same subject. This, in fact, is what the evidence tends to indicate.

It has been claimed that George Leon Walker[17] has corrected "the misrepresentations as to the relations of the quarrel in the Hartford church to the Half-Way Covenant movement into which nearly all the earlier writers have fallen."[18] Walker's conclusion is that the matter of baptism was not a part of the Hartford quarrel of 1653-1659, but rather it was a matter of personality conflict between the teaching elder Samuel Stone and the ruling elder Goodwin. Walker's argument is chiefly based on the absence of any mention of the issue of baptism and church membership in the correspondence regarding the affair. This is at best an argument from silence, and this same correspondence shows that in "the propositions presented by Samuel Stone to the church at Hartford August 2, 1657,"[19] the main emphasis was on the duty of the church to submit to the teaching and doctrine of their teaching elder. The fact that there is no direct reference in the correspondence to the issues of baptism and church membership can be explained by the fact that almost all of the correspondence deals with the later stages of the quarrel. The evidence seems to indicate that the quarrel was occasioned by a difference of view concerning the subjects of baptism and church membership, but once the conflict was underway the issue became one of the relationship between minister and congregation with personality conflicts no doubt adding fuel to the flames.

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[17] History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1883 (Hartford, 1884), pp. 152-176.

[18] Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms (Boston, 1960), p. 240.

William Hubbard's account of the development of the general turmoil in Connecticut contains several observations that should not be overlooked in accounting for the Hartford church difficulties. He tells us that as long as Thomas Hooker lived he was able to control the situation because of his prestige and influence, but after his death in 1647 and the subsequent removal by death and other means of other leading persons, trouble developed when the more conservative church members asserted themselves and repulsed any effort to modify the customary church policy. Hubbard's explanation is as follows:

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[19] "Papers Relating to the Controversy in the Church in Hartford, 1656-59," Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society, II, 75.

> Some of the inhabitants holding more strictly to the former principles of discipline could not well hear that any, in whose real piety they were not satisfied, (as not being confirmed members in the church,) should partake of any higher privileges, civil or ecclesiastical, than formerly belonged to non-members. The first appearance of disturbance, which on that account happened amongst them, was at Hartford, occasioned on the call of a person to supply the place of Mr. Hooker.[20]

Hubbard's allusion to civil privileges is a bit puzzling because civil privileges in Connecticut were not legally dependent upon church membership, but in view of the influential position which the churches enjoyed in that society there may very well have been extra-legal benefits and disabilities involved.

After 1647 difficulties arose in Connecticut, according to Hubbard, because of the efforts "of some of their ministers for enlarging of baptism, and extending the right of membership to children, before their admission into full communion."[21] This statement by Hubbard can be linked quite appropriately to the avowed declarations of Samuel Stone of Hartford. Under date of June 6, 1650, he wrote a letter to Richard Mather of Dorchester in which he expressed the opinion that the children of church members had a right to church membership by virtue of their father's covenant, and if they sought admission to the church they could not be denied. He decried the "sinful neglect of New-England"[22] concerning those individuals who either had not presented themselves for admission or had been denied when they had applied. He stated that he and John Warham of Windsor were in agreement on this matter and desired to practice it but wished for a wider concurrence before starting. He expressed a strong desire for a meeting of the elders to consider the problem and asserted that if there was not a conference of the elders that year in Massachusetts to consider the matter and try to formulate some policy he was going to start the practice of admitting all of the children of the church to membership when they applied.

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[20] William Hubbard, A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1848), p. 315.

[21] Ibid., p. 316.

The details of the actual start of the Hartford quarrel are far from clear, but the circumstantial evidence seems to indicate that the difficulties did center in problems that led to the Half-Way Covenant. This is the conclusion of Benjamin Trumbull who asserted:

> Nothing, however is more evident, from the questions propounded, . . . and by the gentlemen chosen by the disaffected brethren, and rejected by the church, than that the whole controversy respected the qualifications for baptism, church membership, and the rights of the brotherhood.[23]

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[22] Quoted in Increase Mather, First Principles, p. 9.

[23] Benjamin Trumbull, A Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical from the Emigration of its First Planters from England in the Year 1630, to the Year 1764; and to the Close of the Indian Wars, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1818), I, 308.

Once the quarrel was under way the conservative faction led by elder Goodwin received the support of some of the chief men of Hartford such as Governor Webster, Mr. Whiting, Mr. Cullick and others "who were leaders in what they imagined to be a defense of the true principles of Congregationalism."[24] Rev. Stone was inclined toward Presbyterianism, and because of the strong Presbyterian sentiment in the colony and the commanding position of Hartford, it was almost inevitable that the dispute at Hartford became a subject of agitation through the entire colony and caused divisions in the churches. The general religious ferment in the colonies was further aggravated by the appearance of the troublesome Quakers at Boston in July of 1656.

It was in this general situation of religious controversy and discontent that the Connecticut General Court initiated proceedings in 1656 which led to the Assembly of ministers at Boston in 1657. The call for action was most pressing in Connecticut because of the violent internal controversy, but actually all of the colonies were suffering from various degrees of agitation.

At its May 15, 1656 session, the Connecticut Court voted to appoint a committee consisting of Governor John Webster, Thomas Welles, John Cullick and John Talcott to deal with a petition of grievance which had been presented to the Court. The text of this petition does not appear to be extant, but its contents can be easily surmised from the action taken relative to it. The committee was instructed to consult with the elders of the colony concerning the grievances of the petition, and if they thought it necessary to secure their assistance "in drawing up an abstract from the heads of those things, to be presented to the Gen. Courts of the several united colonies."[25] The committee evidently performed its duty, and a list of twenty-one[26] questions were sent to the Massachusetts General Court but apparently not to the other Courts.

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[24] Ibid., I, 297.

The Massachusetts Court reacted with quick and decisive action. On the first day of their next session meeting October 14, 1656, the letter and questions were presented to the Court, and the Court ordered that the following ministers be requested to meet at Boston on June 4, 1657, to discuss the questions: "Richard Mather of Dorchester, John Allen of Dedham, John Norton of Boston, Thomas Thacher of Weymouth, Peter Bulkeley of Concord, Charles Chauncy, the President of Harvard College, Zechariah Symmes of Charlestown, John Sherman of Watertown, Jonathan Mitchell of Cambridge, Edward Norris of Salem, Ezekiel Rogers of Rowley, Samuel Whiting of Lynn and Thomas Cobbett of Ipswich. It was expected that the results of the deliberations would be presented to the Court, and it was ordered that the expenses of the ministers and the cost of the sessions be paid out of the public treasury. The final order of the Court was that a copy of their order was to be sent to the other confederated colonies with a request for their assistance in the discussions to be held.[27]

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[25] The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, J. Hammond Trumbull, editor, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), I, 281.

[26] The Assembly of 1657 answered twenty-one questions, and the Preface to these answers states that they were sent by the Connecticut Court. See p. iii of the Preface given on p. 288 of Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms. It seems reasonable to conclude that these were the questions formulated by the committee appointed for that purpose, although there does not seem to be any direct statement to that effect. An unsuccessful attempt had been made in the February 26, 1656/57 session of the Connecticut Court to add twelve more questions, but we have nothing concerning their nature. See Records of Connecticut, I, 288.

The response to this request was disappointing. Plymouth appears to have taken no action whatsoever, and the reaction from New Haven was hostile. The letter from the Massachusetts Court was read to the New Haven Court on February 24, 1656/57, and the next day the Court sent a letter of declination over the signature of Governor Theophilus Eaton. The Court considered the issues as local ones and the petition of grievances as one which the Connecticut Court should have handled summarily as the Massachusetts Court had earlier handled the Dr. Child petition. New Haven leaders expressed fear of a synod at that time which they thought "may prove dangerous to the purity and peace of these churches and colonies."[28] Particular concern was expressed concerning the motives of the Connecticut petitioners who had touched off the appeal to a synod meeting. The New Haven reply reveals the nature of the rumors that were being circulated and also gives considerable insight into what New Haven at least regarded as a leading threat to their ideal of the pure church. The letter states:

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[27] The details of the Massachusetts Court's actions are given in the Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, Nathaniel Shurtleff, editor, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), III, 419; IV. i, 280.

[28] Records of the Colony or Jurisdiction of New Haven, from May, 1653, to the Union, ed. Charles J. Hoadly (Hartford, 1858), p. 196. This is sometimes referred to as vol. II of New Haven Records.

> We hear the petitioners, or others closing with them, are very confident they shall obtain great alterations, both in civil government and in church discipline, and that some of them have procured or hired one as their agent to maintain in writing, (as is conceived,) that parishes in England, consenting to and continuing their meetings to worship God, are true churches, and such persons coming over hither, (without holding forth any work of faith, etc. ,) have right to all church privileges; and probably they expect their deputy should employ himself and improve his interest, to spread and press such paradoxes in the Massachusetts, yea at the synod or meeting.[29]

It seems very evident that New Haven colony regarded the petition as a Presbyterian plot of much the same nature as the earlier Robert Child petition and deserving of the same fate. To make their petition very clear they included with their letter an answer to the proposed questions. This answer was drawn up by John Davenport, and there can be little doubt that it expressed a fundamentally different line of thinking than that which the scheduled assembly was to adopt.

As might be expected the Connecticut Court acted to implement the Massachusetts action. On February 26, 1656/57, they ordered that the following ministers be requested to join the Boston meeting: John Warham of Windsor, Samuel Stone of Hartford, Richard Blinman of New London and John Russell of Wethersfield. Their expenses were to be paid from the public treasury, and the deputies were empowered to "press horses (if need be,) for the end aforesaid."[30] To fully implement their order they commanded that March 25, 1657, was to be observed throughout the colony as a day of public humiliation on behalf of the forthcoming meeting at Boston.

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[29] Ibid., II, 196-197.

[30] Records of the Colony of Connecticut, I, 281.

The assembly of the ministers met at Boston June 4th through the 19th. Williston Walker's conclusion that "of the course of discussion and the events of the meeting we know nothing"[31] seems to be correct as nothing appears to be extant concerning it. The number of ministers present is in dispute. The original calls were for thirteen from Massachusetts and four from Connecticut. Hubbard said there were twenty-six ministers present and the Preface to the results states that twenty ministers were called by the magistrates, and two or three of them did not attend. Even accepting the lower figure of seventeen the meeting could still be considered as fairly representative of the churches in the two colonies.

The meeting is quite frequently referred to in the literature of the period as a synod; however because of its exclusively ministerial composition it could not technically meet the requirements laid down by the Cambridge Platform that a synod must be composed of elders and representatives of the churches. For this reason it is more properly called an assembly rather than a synod, and by virtue of this fact it would have less influence than a recognized synod.

A copy of the answers given by the assembly was presented to the Connecticut Court on August 12, 1657, and the court ordered that copies of the questions and answers be sent to all of the churches in the Connecticut jurisdiction so that they could be evaluated and the ministers could present any objections to the next General Court.

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[31] Creeds and Platforms, p. 261.

The Massachusetts Court does not appear to have taken any action relative to the results. Apparently it was thought that some of the New England magistrates would order the printing of the findings, but they failed to do so. A manuscript of the results was written by Richard Mather and a copy taken over to England probably by Increase Mather. The explanatory Preface was written in England by Nathaniel Mather.[32] The manuscript was printed at London in 1659 with the title of A Disputation Concerning Church-Members and Their Children, in Answer to XXI. Questions: Wherein the State of Such Children When Adult, Together with Their Duty Towards the Church, and the Churches Duty Towards Them Is Discussed by an Assembly of Divines Meeting at Boston in New England, June 4th, 1657.[33]

The questions and answers dealt with the problems which had vexed the Congregational churches from 1634 on particularly and were destined to vex them for a century and a half more. The tone of the answers was cautious and irenic, and it showed a strong desire on the part of the ministers to make their point without stirring up any more controversy if at all possible. Each answer and point was heavily buttressed with Scriptural references in keeping with the Puritan practice. Questions were asked relative to the status of children seven, ten, twelve, sixteen and twenty years of age, and it seems quite apparent that the framers of the Connecticut questions had actual cases in mind and were not raising just hypothetical questions for the sake of theological discussion. Specific points in the pastor-parent-child relationship were very obviously clamoring for solution. The entire discussion seems to have turned upon the controlling principle of the covenant relationship.

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[32] See discussions in Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 238, 261, 288 concerning the probable authorships.

[33] Richard Mather's manuscript is in the Richard Mather collection of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Abstracts of the results are given in William Hubbard, History of New England, pp. 563-569 and in J. B. Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 154-158. All of the important passages are given in Walker, Creeds, pp. 288-300. All of the quotations which follow are from Walker's verbatim reprint.

The first of the twenty-one questions asks "whether any children of confederate parents be under their parents covenant and members with them," and the answer is that "some children of confederate parents are by means of their parents covenanting, in covenant also, and so members of the church by divine institution." The reason for the qualifying statement "some children" is hard to explain unless it is used as a rhetorical device to develop the argument. Later statements emphatically assert that all children of confederating parents are likewise in covenant. The fifth question asks "whether a father may twice covenant for his children in minority in several churches," and the answers show the extent to which the covenant relationship was regarded as binding and permanent unless changed by due process. A parent who moved from one church to another was called upon to enter into covenant with the church where he moved, and his minor children also were regarded as having covenanted in his action. Because of this it was cited as the duty of the churches, when they give letters of dismissal to parents, to also include their children. In the case of adult children still under parental authority, they were expected to give their own consent to the transfer of membership. If this was not done they were to be regarded as remaining members of the first church.

The seventh question touches the sensitive area of the Lord's Supper and asks "whether as large qualifications be not required of a members child to the participation of the Lord's Supper, and the privileges of votes and censures, as were requirable of his parents at their first entrance?" The answer is that the children should meet the same requirements as their parents which included the "holding forth of faith and repentance with an ability to examine themselves." The answer to the eighth question delimited the range of covenant membership to immediate parents.

Question nine asks "whether adopted children and bond servants be covenant seed?" Evidently this was one of the more sensitive points of discussion because the assembly answered the question in a very cautious fashion. They noted that many godly and learned men regarded these children as enjoying the same covenant relation as the natural seed, and they refused to judge any church which held the same position. The assembly closed the discussion of this question with an assertion that they wished to leave it open for further consideration.

The heart of the Half-Way Covenant controversy was expressed in question ten. As received, the question was rather clumsily worded, and the assembly recast it in order to formulate an answer. As recast it asks:

> Whether the child of a person joined in Church-covenant by means of his or her immediate parents covenant, though such a parent be not admitted to, nor qualified for full communion, nor have covenanted in their own person, whether we say, the child of such person is to be baptized.

The ministerial assembly in answering this question took the position virtually demanded by their Covenant theology. They re-asserted that infants whose immediate parents were in church covenant were confederate with their parents and therefore church members in their own right. They then added some suggestions for procedures to follow relative to these infants. It was their duty "when grown up to years of discretion, though not yet fit for the Lord's Supper, to own the Covenant they made with their parents," and it was the duty of the church to call upon them to do so. If the individual remained obstinate in this regard or scandalous in his life it was the duty of the church to proceed with excommunication. This suggestion of excommunication for failure to renew the baptismal covenant may reflect the influence of John Davenport[34] or a concession to his views although absent from the assembly. The present study has not uncovered any evidence to show that excommunication was actually performed apart from offensive conduct, but instead the children of the church were constantly exhorted to take hold of their father's covenant. The possibility of excommunication may have served as a prod to encourage the more reluctant ones to perform what was declared to be their duty.

If the individual did meet the required conditions of showing an understanding of the principles of religion, living an acceptable life and owning the covenant, the assembly gave it as their judgment that baptism should not be denied to his children. This conclusion was then bolstered with a lengthy argument for the practice which included the opinion that "members are better or worse, and communion is more or less; but membership admits not of degrees." This was essentially the same argument which had been advanced earlier by John Norton.

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[34] See discussion of Davenport's view in Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I, 612.

Consistent with this qualitative view of membership the proposition was advanced that conditions had to be met before admission to full communion which was here explained as embracing the right to partake of the Lord's Supper and to vote. This explanation is important because it clearly shows what was included in the idea of full communion. The term was of such common usage in Congregational parlance that seldom is an explanation found of its meaning. Here it clearly shows that voting in church affairs was not intended as a concession of the Half-Way Covenant principle, and all of the evidence seems to show that if individual churches ever did allow such voting it was a decided exception to the general practice. The requirement for full communion stated concerning the candidates: "they must so hold forth their faith and repentance, unto the judgment of charity by way of confession in the congregation, as it may appear unto the church, that they are able to examine themselves and to discern the Lord's body." This clearly maintained the fundamental practice of making a public relation of religious experience before admission to the Lord's Supper and voting.

The remainder of the questions concerned problems ancilliary to the main one. The answer to question nineteen is noteworthy for its explanation of historical faith which is another expression occurring very frequently in the discussions of that period. The question was "whether historical faith and a blameless life fit a member's child for all ordinances and privileges, and he must be examined only about them?" The answer was that historical faith "the meer knowledge of the fundamental doctrine of faith and a blameless life" is not enough, but the individual must be examined concerning his faith and repentence.

The 1657 version of the Half-Way Covenant skirted the issue of adopted children and servant's children but took a clear stand on most of the other pressing issues. Children of church members were members in their own right and had the privilege of having their children baptized provided they renewed their own baptismal covenant. The privileges of full communion were reserved for those who could meet the standard of having a religious experience, and the institution of the public relation of that experience was preserved. No fundamental Congregational principle appears to have been compromised, but rather an old one was formalized as the theory of the continuity of the covenant relation was re-affirmed. At the same time the purity of the church was preserved in theory at least, and the Lord's Supper was protected from defilement.

CHAPTER VII

CONFIRMATION OF THE HALF-WAY COVENANT: 1662

The recommendations of the ministerial assembly which met at Boston in 1657 were designed to calm the troubled baptismal waters of New England, but instead of accomplishing this they appear to have succeeded only in stirring up more of a tempest. In writing of the assembly of 1657 Benjamin Trumbull suggested that "a number of the ministers, and churches pretty generally, viewed this as a great innovation, and entirely inconsistent with the principles on which the churches of New England were originally founded, and with the principles of Congregationalism."[1] William Hubbard analyzed the reaction to the proposals and reported that the pastors saw the need for a change in the regulations concerning baptism, but at the same time the people as a whole maintained a much more conservative position than their pastors and objected to any change in the time-honored procedures. He indicated that the result of this lay-clerical cleavage was as follows: "It is well known that some of the ablest ministers of the country, that were most forward and ready to promote these resolves, never durst adventure upon the practice thereof, for fear of making a breach in their respective churches."[2] The pastors were caught on the horns of a very real dilemma. They were under constantly mounting pressure from one faction in their congregations to increase the latitude for baptism of infants, but at the same time they faced intense opposition from another faction if they did so.

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[1] Benjamin Trumbull, A Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of its First Planters, from England in the Year 1630, to the Year 1764; and to the Close of the Indian Wars, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1818), I, 304.

[2] William Hubbard, A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1848), p 570. See also p. 562 in this regard.

As near as can be determined the first minister in Connecticut actually to begin the Half-Way Covenant practice in response to the recommendations of the assembly was John Warham of Windsor. The course of the Half-Way Covenant practice in the Windsor church is a good illustration of its controversial nature. Warham began the practice January 31, 1657/8, and continued it until March 19, 1664/5, when he discontinued it because of the arguments against it. The practice was resumed by church vote on June 21, 1668, under the pastorate of Nathaniel Chauncy, the son of the Harvard President, who had earlier so vigorously opposed the entire Half-Way Covenant scheme. It appears to have been set aside again during the pastorate of David S. Rowland who was pastor from 1776 to 1789. Subsequently it was reinstated and not finally abandoned in the Windsor church until 1822.[3]

The agitation which had started in the Connecticut churches in 1653 continued and resulted in the migration in 1659 and 1660 of elements from the Hartford, Wethersfield and Windsor churches to Hadley, Massachusetts, where a new settlement was started. It has already been suggested that the start of the Connecticut church quarrels is largely traceable to the baptismal issue, and the subsequent agitations and difficulties were compounded by this and ensuing issues. How much immediate influence the Half-Way Covenant controversy had on the migration seems virtually impossible to determine, but it certainly was an underlying cause of the difficulties leading to the migration.

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[3] For the history of the Half-Way Covenant in the Windsor church See Henry H. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut . . . (New York, 1859), pp. 172-173 and also Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut . . . (New Haven, 1861), p. 511.

Developments in Richard Mather's church at Dorchester also illustrate some of the problems and difficulties which the ministers faced in trying to adopt the Half-Way Covenant practices in their churches. Under the date of September 27, 1657, the Dorchester church records contain the notation that a child was presented for baptism by her father, and there is the lament by the recorder that "he was no member according to our church order: but a corruption creeping in as an harbinger to Old England practices viz. to make all members: (which God prevent in mercy)."[4] This statement seems to indicate that the father had been admitted to some degree of church membership but not according to the accepted mode. Evidently there was very strong sentiment in the church against allowing this baptism, and the child apparently was not granted baptism until 1665 when her mother became a member in full communion and the child was baptized.[5]

The next effort in the Dorchester church to put in practice the suggestions of the assembly was in May of 1660, when Richard Mather kept his congregation after the evening service and admonished them concerning their children and reminded them of the action of the 1657 assembly and their responsibility to act in line with its recommendations. In September a couple of the congregation indicated their strong desire to have their children baptized. Neither of them was judged to be fit for the Lord's Table, but both were willing to "publicly own and take hold of their fathers' covenant."[6] There was considerable dissatisfaction expressed concerning this procedure, and the subject was debated at three succeeding church meetings without coming to any conclusion. Extensive arguments presented for their right to have their children baptized are recorded in the church records. These arguments did not appeal to the action of the assembly of 1657 but rather to the idea that the parents were members of the church or they never would have been baptized, and they had never been cut off from their membership because there were only three ways this could be done. These were by death, by excommunication, or by their church ceasing to exist. Acknowledgment was made that some other authorities added apostacy and wilful separation from the church as additional means of terminating the church relation. Another line of argument was based on the supposed continuity between the Old Testament relation and the New Testament with the emphasis on the fact that the New was better and if the Old guaranteed a continuity of membership then the New did so much more. The issue was not settled formally in the Dorchester church until 1677 when the church voted to accept the Half-Way Covenant practice.[7]

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[4] Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734, ed., Arthur B. Ellis (Boston, 1891), p. 168.

[5] Ibid., p. 174.

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[6] Ibid., p. 34.

Several political developments of 1660 added to the difficulties confronting the New England churches. In May the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II was brought about and with him the Church of England was restored to ecclesiastical control. The downfall of English Puritanism and the ascent of its enemies called for a united front in the colonies if they were to be in a position to bargain with the new forces. The danger of their internal bickering must have been evident to all of the leaders in the colonies, but any action they might take could very well stir up more dissension as had been the case after the 1657 assembly. The situation was further complicated by the arrival of the regicides Whaley and Goff in Boston in July of 1660. The problem of giving them refuge and still trying to maintain a favorable relationship with the English crown was a vexing one for New England's leaders. An entry in John Hull's diary clearly shows the main issues facing New England. Under date of February 27, 1660/1, he recorded the holding of a day of fasting in the churches for a number of ills but chiefly for the purpose of securing guidance as to what action should be taken regarding the regicides, and also what to do in order that "this great question about the right and privileges of the children in our churches, and the duty of each church toward them might be more fully understood and embraced."[8]

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[7] Ibid. See pp. 35-40, 69-75, for the details of action in this church.

[8] John Hull, "Diary of John Hull," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. III, 199.

July 30, 1661, the Salem church voted[9] that the children of persons who had been themselves covenant children were entitled to baptism, and by this action reaffirmed the stand they had taken in 1654; however opposition in the church prevented the carrying out of the provisions of this vote until July of 1665, and this again shows how deeply divided the churches were on this issue.

The hesitancy of the churches in adopting the Half-Way Covenant practices and the agitation concerning it led to the conclusion that the opposition could only be countered by a full synod of the Massachusetts Bay Colony churches. The matter was laid before the Court, and on December 31, 1661, the Court issued an order for a synod. This order clearly provided for a synod according to the standards of the Cambridge Platform. The churches were ordered to send messengers in the form of elders and brethren to meet in Boston on the second Tuesday of March, 1662, for the purpose of discussing the questions which might be submitted to them by the Massachusetts Court. The neighboring elders, probably meaning those in Boston and vicinity, were ordered to meet as soon as possible to decide what additional questions, if any, should be discussed by the synod. The question submitted by the Court was "who are the subjects of baptism." The meeting of the elders added the question "whether, according to the word of God, there ought to be a consociation of churches, and what should be the manner of it."[10] Each church was to pay the expenses of the messengers sent by that church. This provision contrasts with that of the assembly of 1657 when expenses were all paid out of the public treasury. The reason for this difference may have been due to the exclusively ministerial nature of the first meeting, or there may have been objections to the practice from those who opposed the granting of clerical privileges.

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[9] Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England . . ., 2 vols. (Boston, 1855, 1862), II, 280.

Notices of the order of the Court and the questions to be discussed were apparently sent to all the churches in Massachusetts Bay. The order was read in the Salem church on February 26, 1661/2, and the decision postponed until the next Sunday when Major Hawthorne, Mr. Bartholmew and the pastor, John Higginson, were chosen as messengers from that church.[11] The First Church of Boston responded by choosing their pastor, John Wilson, their elders William Colborne and James Penn, and the brethren Captain Thomas Savage and Jerimie Howchin to serve as their messengers.[12]

The rest of the membership of the synod apparently cannot be as precisely determined as that of the men just mentioned. John Norton, teacher of the Boston First Church, was in England in the interest of the Massachusetts Colony from February 7 to September 3, 1662, but seems to have taken an active role in the last session of the synod. The Boston church was the host church, and this may account for what seems to be a comparatively large delegation. It is evident that there was no uniformity in the number of delegates sent. The fact that each church had to pay the expense of its own delegates would seem to have weighted the delegates in favor of the wealthier churches and those in and near Boston. Whether this influenced the outcome or not can only be a matter of conjecture.

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[10] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, ed. Nathaniel Shurtleff, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), IV, pt. 2, 38, gives both questions and the pertinent details.

[11] Daniel Appleton White, New England Congregationalism in its Origin and Purity illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject (Salem, 1861), p. 53.

[12] Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868, ed. Richard D. Pierce, 3 vols, in Collections of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Vols. 39-41 (Boston, 1961), I, 58.

In addition to the three ministers previously mentioned there is evidence to show that the following ministers were also in attendance at the synod:[13] Richard Mather of Dorchester, Eleazer Mather of Northampton, John Mayo of the Second Church of Boston, John Allen of Dedham, Zechariah Symmes of Charleston, Thomas Parker of Newbury, Jonathan Mitchell of the Cambridge church and President Charles Chauncy of Harvard. Increase Mather was preaching in the Second Church Boston but was not ordained until 1664. He was, however, present in the synod as a delegate from his father's church at Dorchester.[14] Thus it appears that at least eleven of the ministerial delegates can be identified out of a possible thirty-five, if John Norton is included, that could have been there from Massachusetts. The total membership of the synod consisted "of above seventy,"[15] and so slightly over one-half of the membership was evidently lay rather than clerical.

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[13] Much of this discussion concerning the synod of 1662 is based on Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), pp. 263-269 and on Henry M. Dexter, "Two Hundred Years Ago in New England," The Congregational Quarterly, IV (July, 1862), 268-291. On p. 240 of his work Walker evaluates Dexter's contribution as "a most valuable and almost exhaustive monograph on the Synod of 1662."

[14] Records of the First Church at Dorchester, p. 39.

Much of the mechanics of the synod are rather obscure. There is a tradition that Samuel Whiting of Lynn presided over the sessions, and it seems reasonably certain that the sessions were held in the First Church of Boston, although positive evidence is lacking. There is no known record extant of its officers, members and proceedings; so most of the information concerning the synod has to be gleaned from allusions to it. The first session of the synod apparently convened March 10, 1662,[16] and the leadership of the two factions debating the question of the subjects of baptism probably was taken by Jonathan Mitchell of Cambridge for those who favored the enlarged practice as recommended by the 1657 assembly and by President Charles Chauncy of Harvard for those who opposed any relaxation of rigid Congregational principles. With Chauncy were John Mayo and the two Mather brothers, Increase of the Boston Second Church and Eleazer of Northampton.

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[15] [Richard Mather], A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod met at Boston in the Year 1662 . . . (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1664), p. 3.

[16] The call of the Massachusetts Court said "the 2d Tuesday of the first month" which seems to have fallen on March 11. The Salem records state that the call was for "the 10th of the 1st month." The Boston First Church records state that the call was for "the 12th day of the 1st month, 1662. The title of Chauncy's Anti-Synodalia gives the date as March 10, 1662.

They stood in opposition to their father Richard who probably made a very able lieutenant to Mitchell in pushing for laxer practice. Chauncy reports[17] that the lay delegates were overwhelmed by the intricacies of Puritan logic and debate so that the field of debate was left to the clergy. Evidently the discussions were lengthy because the records of the Salem church tell us the synod met for nearly a fortnight, and then "finding the questions to be weighty, and that divers of them could not then stay longer they adjourned the Synod to the 10th of the 4th month next."[18] Notice of this was given the Salem church by its messengers on the Sabbath following their return from Boston.

Information on the second session is very scant. The short entry in the Salem church records says "the Synod meeting again on the 10th of the 4th month was adjourned again till the 10th of September, of which notice was given to the Church."[19] This seems to indicate a short session, possibly only a day or so, and it may have been speedily adjourned in the interest of peace because the session evidently was a stormy one. Eleazer Mather reported that the Presbyterian-inclined Thomas Parker of Newbury, who "was one of the great antagonists of the congregational way," presented

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[17] [Charles Chauncy], Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana. Or, a Proposal of the Judgment of the Dissenting Messengers of the Churches of New-England Assembled by the Appointment of the General Court, March 10, 1662 [London, 1662], p 5.

[18] White, New England Congregationalism, pp. 53-54.

[19] Ibid., p. 54.

"many motions, to consider whether we were in the right ecclesiastical order,"[20] which were ignored by the synod. Parker was not the only one bent on stirring up trouble. Widespread agitation was evident in Mather's further complaint that "there was scarce any of the congregational principles, but what were layen at by some or other of the assembly; as relations of the work of grace, power of voting of the fraternity in admission, profession of faith and repentance not to be required of such as were baptized in the church, in reference to the baptism of their children."[21]

The source of this agitation is not given by Mather, but it may very well be that as reports of the debates of the first session of the synod had been carried back to the churches by the messengers that dissident elements had seized the occasion to air their grievances against strict Congregational policies. At the second session of the synod these complaints could have been conveyed to the synod by the returning delegates or by the malcontents themselves. Those complaints reported by Eleazer Mather struck at some of the very fundamentals of Congregationalism. The attack on the practice of relations struck at the concept of the pure church, and the attack on the practice of the congregation voting on the admission of members struck at its fundamental democratic concept of the power of the congregation. The converse of this last principle would have put the power in an elite group of elders which was precisely the Presbyterian system. Both of these principles were equally repugnant to a majority of those on both sides of the baptismal dispute; so prudence would have dictated a speedy adjournment in order to assess the situation and perhaps to mend fences. The turmoil did not augur well for a peaceful reception of the synod's results.

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[20] Letter of Eleazer Mather to John Davenport dated "4th of 5th month, 1662," in Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936), I, 192.

[21] Ibid., I, 192.

The final session of the synod probably re-convened at Boston on September 10, 1662.[22] We do not know the adjournment date of this last session, but the results were presented to the Massachusetts Court on October 8, 1662.

Among the scattered references to the course of the synod is the information that John Davenport of New Haven Colony wrote out his opinions on the subject under discussion in Massachusetts and sent them to Increase Mather who attempted to read them to the synod but was blocked by John Norton. Mather then left a copy of Davenport's writings with the synod, and the report is that they were widely copied by members of that body. Chauncy, Mayo and Eleazer and Increase Mather, acting, so they claimed, on behalf of the others in the synod who thought as they did, wrote a preface to Davenport's communication in which they expressed their full concurrence with its contents. This was presented to the Court. Some of the Court wanted to throw it out without even being read, but the majority of the Court were less antagonistic; however the only concession the dissenters were able to obtain from the Court was permission to print their document if they wished.[23]

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[22] The Salem records, White, New England Congregationalism, p. 54, say that the previous meeting was adjourned until "the 10th of September." This seems to be the only indication of the date of the third and last session of the synod of 1662.

Davenport's attempt to meddle in the affairs of a Massachusetts synod may seem out of place, but he unquestionably was acting from a sense of deep responsibility for the truth as he esteemed it. Davenport had a deep personal involvement in the problem of baptism dating back to 1634 and his controversy with the Dutch clergy and John Paget, pastor of the English congregation at Amsterdam over the issue of the baptism of children of non-Christian parents. The problem at that time seems to have been Davenport's stand for the "non-baptism of infants, unless he approve the parent's faith and life."[24] Davenport insisted that at least one of the parents must be in a covenant relationship with God, and this brought him into conflict with the Dutch clergy who evidently were extremely lax in their requirements for baptism and who were able to silence him by holding the threat of ejection over him. Davenport claimed that the Dutch clergy were willing to baptize the children of unbelievers on the assumption that the infant's grand-father or great grand-father might have been a Christian. The issues of 1662 must have seemed strikingly similar to those of 1634 in the mind of

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[23] From a letter of Increase Mather to John Davenport, October 22, 1662, in Hutchinson, History of the Colony of Massachusetts-Bay, II, 192.

[24] Worthington Chauncy Ford, "Davenport-Paget Controversy," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, XLIII (October, 1909-June, 1910), 46.

Davenport, and this certainly helps to explain his interest in the Massachusetts proceedings.

The propositions which the Synod of 1662 formulated were apparently voted on one by one after much discussion. The arguments in turn which were used to bolster each proposition were then drawn up by some one to whom the task was assigned. These were read to the assembly several times, discussed, then voted upon. Most of the final draft of the results of the synod was composed by Jonathan Mitchell. He tells us that he supposes "there were not five twice told that did in any thing vote on the negative."[25] Cotton Mather claims that the entire scheme relative to the first question was adopted by a vote of more than seven to one, and that the opposing votes came from those "who were jealous lest the sacred ordinance of baptism should come to be applied unto such unmeet subjects as would in a while put an end unto New-England's primitive and peculiar glory of 'undefiled administrations."[26]

The synod apparently spent nearly all of its available time on the first major question and as time was running out hastily composed an answer to the second question concerning the matter of consociation of churches. There was no controversy regarding this, and the synod largely re-affirmed the position of the Cambridge Platform. Increase Mather reported that not one elder and only one of the lay delegates voted against the answer to the second question.[27]

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[25] Preface to [Richard Mather], Defence of the Answer, p. 3.

[26] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England from its First Planting in the Year 1620 unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1853-1855), II, 302.

The conclusions of the synod were presented to the Massachusetts Court that had ordered the deliberations by a committee of four ministers on October 8, 1662. The Court's examination of the synod's propositions resulted in a vote "to commend the same unto the consideration of all the churches and people of this jurisdiction, and for that end ordered the printing thereof, the original copy being left on file."[28] The Court also ordered that a suitable Preface for the work be prepared and sent to the printer and that Mitchell oversee the printing to prevent errors. The Preface was prepared and its authorship is commonly attributed to Jonathan Mitchell who may very well have been its chief author; however the Preface itself indicates that the work was that of a committee appointed for that purpose. It says: "A Preface was desired by the Assembly to be prefixed by some appointed thereunto, which is here accordingly by them performed."

The sixteen page Preface and thirty-two pages of text were printed by Samuel Green at Cambridge before the end of 1662 under the title of Propositions Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Consociation of Churches, Collected and Confirmed Out of the Word of God, by a Synod of Elders and

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[27] Increase Mather, Disquisition Concerning Ecclesiastical Councils (Boston, 1716), p. 37. This has been reprinted in the Congregational Quarterly, XII (July, 1870).

[28] Records of Massachusetts Bay, IV, Pt. 2, 60.

Messengers of the Churches in Massachusetts-Colony in New England. Assembled at Boston, according to Appointment of the Honoured General Court, in the Year 1662.[29] Two separate printings were made in London the same year with the same title. One of these printings included Charles Chauncy's Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana as an appendix to give the answer of the dissenting brethren.

The Preface to the Propositions is decidedly apologetic as if the authors fully anticipated the storm that was due to break over the published results of their synod. The framers of the Preface acknowledged that the recommendations of the synod would please neither extremes. They said: "We are not ignorant that this our labour will by divers be diversly censured; some will account us too strict in the point of baptism, and others too lax and large." The principle of protecting the Lord's Supper from defilement was vigorously asserted in the Preface: "Neither dare we admit those unto the holy table of the Lord, that are short of Scripture qualifications for it; viz. ability to examine themselves, and discern the Lord's body." Likewise the principle of excluding from baptism "those whose parents are not under any church power or government any where" was asserted. A word of exhortation and caution was given to the youth of the land in view of the consideration that had been extended to them. They were solemnly warned against trying to break in "upon the Lord's Table (or upon the privileges of full communion) without due qualification, and orderly admission thereunto, lest you eat and drink your own damnation." These affirmations in the Preface tended to militate against the charge that "the ideal of the 'pure church' was virtually surrendered in the days of the Synod of 1662."[30] The men who were instrumental in forming the policies laid down in 1662 would have shuddered at such an idea. They were interested in developing a workable scheme which would preserve the purity of the church and at the same time assure its continuity. The bulk of the arguments of the Preface was directed against any charge of declension from their first principles. Appeal was made to the affirmation of the Cambridge Platform that "children are Church-members," and an array of comment from seven of the esteemed early ministers of New England was mustered to show that they believed what the synod was propounding.

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[29] The manuscript is in the Richard Mather Collection of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. There have been numerous other printings: The Results of Three Synods . . . (Boston, 1725), pp. 50-93; The Original Constitution, Order and Faith of the New England Churches . . . (Boston 1812), pp. 69-118; Mather, Magnalia (Hartford, 1853-1855), II, 279-301 which contains some inaccuracies; Congregational Quarterly, IV (July, 1862), 275-286; Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), pp. 301-339.

The formal statement of doctrine concerning the baptism of infants and their relationship to the church was given in seven propositions by the Synod of 1662. The fifth of these propositions is generally regarded as stating the essence of the Half-Way Covenant idea. The text of the seven propositions is as follows:

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[30] Peter Ymen de Jong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1945), p. 205.

THE ANSWER OF THE ELDERS AND OTHER MESSENGERS of the Churches, Assembled at Boston in the Year 1662, TO The Questions Propounded to them by ORDER of the Honoured GENERAL COURT.

Quest, I. Who are the Subjects of Baptism?
Answ: The Answer may be given in the following propositions, briefly confirmed from the Scriptures.

1. They that according to Scripture, are Members of the Visible Church, are the subjects of Baptisme.

2. The Members of the Visible Church according to scripture, are Confederate visible Believers, in particular Churches, and their infant-seed, i. e. children in minority, whose next parents, one or both, are in Covenant.

3. The Infant-seed of confederate visible Believers, are members of the same Church with their parents, and when grown up, are personally under the watch, discipline and Government of that Church.

4. These Adult persons, are not therefore to be admitted to full Communion, meerly because they are and continue members, without such further qualifications, as the Word of God requireth therunto.

5. Church-members who were admitted in minority, understanding the Doctrine of Faith, and publickly professing their assent thereto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the Covenant before the Church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in the Church, their children are to be Baptized.

6. Such Church-members, who either by death, or some other extraordinary Providence, have been inevitably hindred from publick acting as aforesaid, yet have given the Church cause, in judgment of charity, to look at them as so qualified, and such as had they been called thereunto, would have so acted, their children are to be Baptized.

7. The members of Orthodox Churches, being sound in the Faith, and not scandalous in life, and presenting due testimony thereof; these occasionally coming from one Church to another, may have their children Baptized in the church whither they come, by virtue of communion of churches: but if they remove their habitation, they ought orderly to covenant and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in the church where they settle their abode, and so their children to be Baptised. It being the churches duty to receive such unto communion, so farr as they are regularly fit for the same.

The Confirmation of these Propositions from the Scripture followeth.[31]

The propositions are followed by extensive proofs and arguments for their validity. The entire argument was later summarized thus by Jonathan Mitchell: "We ground all upon federal holiness, or membership in the visible church."[32] So intensely ingrained into Puritan theology was this concept of the covenant relationship that the third proposition which asserted the church membership of the infant seed of confederate believers was actually propounded by one of the leaders of the dissenters,[33] and it was adopted with only three dissenting votes.[34] Apparently the most contested proposition was the fifth which contains the heart of the Half-Way Covenant idea. Three drafts of this were submitted to the synod, and the most radical of the three was adopted.[35]

There is one noteworthy omission from the suggestions of the Synod of 1662 as compared with those of the Assembly of 1657. There was no suggestion of proceeding with excommunication against those who fail to own the covenant when approached to do so. In this respect the results of 1662 represent a much milder approach than those of 1657. Evidently the earlier proposal was regarded as too strong a medicine to be made effective.

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[31] Text is from Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 312-314.

[32] [Richard Mather], Defence of the Answer, p. 44.

[33] John Allin, Animadversions Upon the Antisynodalia Americana (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1664), p. 13.

[34] [Richard Mather], Defence of the Answer, p. 3.

[35] [Charles Chauncy], Anti-Synodalia, p. 27.

The propositions of the synod clearly established a dual membership within the church. There were those who were members solely by virtue of the fact that their parents were in covenant relationship. The first three propositions established this membership, and the fifth provision provided for its continuity. On the other hand the fourth proposition excluded them from the privileges enjoyed by other members who were in full communion. In contrast to these partial or limited members there were those who met the stringent requirements for full membership and enjoyed all of the privileges that went with it.

Precedents for the concept of duality of membership can be found in most Christian communions. The distinctive feature of New England Congregationalism was the severity of the requirement for movement from the one class of membership to the other. Almost all Christian groups that practice infant baptism place some barrier, such as catechism and confirmation, between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Progression in status can be found in both Jewish and early Christian practice, and the New England theologians appealed to both. John Norton appealed to the principle of distinction in membership by citing the parallel of the threefold relation of non-Jews to the Jewish faith. He cited the classification of aliens who were neither a friend of the Jews nor an adherent of their religion, the proselyte of the gate who was a friend of the Jews, and lastly the proselyte in equity who was both a friend and an adherent of the Jewish religion. In similar fashion he cited the practice of the early church in which he said there were the catechumens who were only listeners, from their ranks came the candidates who after a probationary period were admitted to the ranks of the faithful or the Christians and then allowed to have the sacrament of baptism and last of all to partake of communion.[36]

The principle of limiting the participants of the Lord's Supper to those in a specific covenantal relationship to a particular church is found quite early in the Reformers. John A. Lasco, Valérand Poullain and the English exiles at Frankfort after the adoption of their new discipline all had a restricted participation. One of the most striking cases and one involving an influential Puritan was that of Hugh Peter who re-constituted his Rotterdam church in 1633 and of whom one of his parishioners complained as follows: "I have here sent you Mr. Peter's covenant which he made and unless we will all subscribe to this his covenant we shall not be admitted to the Lord's Table neither old members nor new."[37] The New England principle of dual status in the church and restricted participation in the communion service seems to have been well grounded on past precedents.

The basic motivation behind the appeal to the principle of dual status within the church seems to have been the belief that it would solve the dilemma created by the ideal of the pure church on the one hand and the

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[36] John Norton's discussion is in his Answer to the Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollinus, Pastor of the Church of Middelburg Looking toward the Resolution of Certain Controversies Concerning Church Government Now Being Agitated in England, trans. Douglas Horton (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), pp. 29-30.

[37] The text of this letter and a discussion of the incident is given in Raymond Phineas Stearns, Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands the Rise and Fall of the English Congregational Classis 1621-1635 (Chicago, 1940), p. 55. It is also given in Champlain Burrage, The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641), 2 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1912), II, 272-273.

firm belief in covenant continuity on the other. The demand for a solution came from both the ministers and a large segment of the people who wanted their children baptized. The ministers regarded it as their duty to keep the children of the church within the covenant fold, and baptism was the sign and seal of that relationship. Belief in the importance of maintaining the covenant relationship is seen in this statement from the Preface to the propositions of 1662:

> The mercy and grace of the covenant is extended to the faithful and their seed unto a thousand generations, if the successive parents do but in the least degree shew themselves to be lovers of God, and keepers of his covenant and commandments, so the Lord will never reject them till they reject him.

The same concept was expounded by Cotton Mather who said that the ministers regarded the posterity of the faithful as the nursery from which the church was to be continued. This nursery was to be watered by baptism, pruned by discipline and dressed by the ministry of the word of God. If this was done the ministers had the very firm conviction expressed by Mather thus:

> Yea, they thought that, besides the internal benefits of the new covenant unto the elect of God, the sealing of that covenant unto them that were visibly the right subjects of it, would be an assurance from God that when these persons grew up to years of discretion, he would infallibly make them the offer of his covenant and so continue the gospel of it among them.[38]

This belief in the infallibility of the offer was both a source of great comfort to the parents and also a source of vexation if their children did not always respond to the offer in the manner expected. It has been aptly suggested that "Puritans classified all human relationships as natural, violent, or voluntary . . . [and] all voluntary relationships can be based upon a covenant."[39] The New England Puritans viewed their children as naturally in the covenant relationship but also needing to augment this by a voluntary act on their part when God called upon them to do so as he would without fail. Their failure to respond could be regarded as nothing but perverseness on their part.

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[38] Cotton Mather, Magnalia, II, 98-99.

The ministers were also very fearful of the apostacy which would result if the children were completely removed from church inspection and discipline. The third proposition of 1662 and its supporting arguments affirmed this position, and it appears as a constant theme in the arguments concerning the Half-Way Covenant. It is heavily stressed in Increase Mather's First Principles, for example, and especially in the Preface.

Not only were the ministers vitally interested in the problems the Half-Way Covenant sought to solve, but there were also the personal needs of a considerable portion of the people that the covenant seems to have been designed to meet. It is possible to distinguish three broad classes of the children of the church who benefited in some way or another from the Half-Way Covenant system. There were those who had little if any real interest in their church but did want their children baptized in response to a long established custom. The church records are filled with entries of persons who owned the covenant and had their children baptized shortly thereafter, in fact this seems to have been the common procedure. For these folks it was a matter of convenience rather than any particular religious conviction. They were interested in the minimum essentials of church relationship, but at least they were kept under church supervision with its restraining influence upon their conduct. Thus the Half-Way Covenant can be said to have had a social influence beyond its ecclesiastical function.

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[39] William W. McKee, "The Idea of Covenant in Early English Puritanism (1580-1643)" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1948), p. 276.

A second group who derived some benefit from the system given formal status by the Synod of 1662 was made up of those children of the church who were earnestly and deeply interested in the church and its teaching but were unable to muster the religious experience deemed a prerequisite for admission to full communion. Many times these were persons of deep and abiding piety and were the real victims of what later Congregationalists recognized as an unduly severe requirement for church membership by their tacit abandonment of it. The Half-Way Covenant scheme did provide the means for a limited church membership for them. Increase Mather wrote as follows concerning these individuals:

> There were multitudes of well-disposed persons who professed themselves desirous to renew their baptismal covenant, and submit unto the church-discipline, and so have their houses also marked for the Lord's; but yet they could not come up to that experimental account of their Regeneration which would sufficiently embolden their access unto the Table of the Lord, and which the Churches required of them.[40]

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[40] From the "Remarkables of Increase Mather," p. 50, as quoted in Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I, 294-295.

The third group of potential beneficiaries of the new system were those who apparently could have met the requirements for full communion but were held back by their own doubts and fears. These fears were mainly inspired by the intense Puritan effort to prevent an unworthy partaking of the Lord's Supper. Such persons could take the Half-Way Covenant and thus avoid the stigma of having cut themselves and their posterity off from the covenant. At the same time they could avoid the fearsome prospect of partaking of the Supper and then incurring the wrath of God because of their unworthy condition. Church members in full communion were expected to partake of the Supper although there were exceptions such as John Warham of Windsor who illustrates the fear which even a minister might have. He is reported to have sometimes administered the sacrament to his flock but to have abstained from partaking himself.[41] Most, and perhaps all of the exceptions to the general rule that members in full communion must partake of the Lord's Supper were in Connecticut as far as can be determined from the available evidence. Notable exceptions in Connecticut were in the Stratford church and the Winton Parish, now Bloomfield, church. For a limited period of five years from 1786 to 1791, the Winston Parish church followed the rule of the Stratford church which "admitted persons to full communion, without necessarily requiring them to partake of the Lord's Supper."[42] In 1776 the North Windsor Society had adopted a similar rule.

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[41] Mather, Magnalia, I, 442.

[42] The quotation is from the records of the Winton Parish church as given in Stiles, History of Ancient Windsor, p. 373.

Samuel Sewall's Diary shows his doubts and fears regarding the matter of joining the church in full communion and partaking of the Lord's Supper. In 1677 he sought assurances from his minister that he was spiritually fit for the Supper, but the assurances were not enough to convince him that he was ready. Two years later he was still in doubt and suffering misgivings. Finally he did muster enough courage to join the church and partake of the Lord's Supper with the result that he was filled with terror at the thought of what might happen to him for his audacity.[43] These fears of possible harm for partaking of the sacrament are clearly based on the warning of 1 Cor. 11:29 that "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh his own damnation."

By means of what was called in derision by its enemies the Half-Way Covenant, the majority of the Massachusetts theologicans had formulated a system which they felt would meet the needs of the various classes of people related to the church. By it they hoped to provide for the continuity of the church and to allow the continued extension of the sign of the covenant to those children whose parents lacked the qualifications for the full exercise of their covenant position. They also firmly believed that they had at the same time fully preserved the purity of the church and had provided for peace in the troubled church affairs. The success of their labors depended upon the reception which the churches would give to the scheme worked out by their messengers.

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[43] Samuel Sewall, Diary of Samuel Sewall, in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 5th Ser., V-VII (Boston, 1878), V, 34, 38, 46-47, give the details.

CHAPTER VIII

RECEPTION OF THE SYSTEM

The system approved by the Synod of 1662 with a more than seven to one majority and commended to the churches by the Massachusetts General Court actually had no legal binding force. John Norton had expressed the guiding principle in such matters in 1645, when he wrote that "particular churches should acquiesce in the lawful decrees of a synod accepted by the churches (that is, by a majority of the churches) and approved by a Christian magistrate."[1] Some of the ministers and many of the laymen were not willing to make this acquiescence to the decrees of the synod. The issues were analyzed and reported by William Hubbard who noted that troubles arose in the country following the discussion of the two questions in the synod. His report is:

> For in the agitation on and determination of those questions several things were delivered for undeniable positions, which sundry of the ministers, and many of the members of the churches throughout the country, were ready to reflect upon, as innovations without Scripture warrant, and that would have a direct tendency to undermine the liberty of the churches, as well as to abate, if not corrupt, the purity of them, which occasioned much opposition against the receiving the foresaid determination in many of the churches of Massachusetts, as well as in some of the neighboring colonies.[2]

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[1] John Norton, The Answer to the Whole Set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollinius, Pastor of the Church of Middelburg Looking Toward the Resolution of Certain Controversies Concerning Church Government Now Being Agitated in England, trans. Douglas Horton (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 134.

[2] William Hubbard, A General History of New England from the Discovery to 1680, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1848), p. 601.

Cotton Mather noted that the reception of the system was "very gradual" and that although most of the pastors favored its use they were restrained in many of the churches by numbers of the laymen who were so "stiffly and fiercely set the other way"[3] that the pastors dared not institute the policy. Mather's discussion reveals that in his time most of the churches practiced the system in varying degrees, but some of them had not. Actually the First Churches of Boston and Plymouth did not formally embrace the Half-Way Covenant until 1731, and in 1769 Joseph Bellamy wrote that "even to this day the custom is not become universal."[4]

It is evident from the discussion by Hubbard and Mather, as well as others, that the opposition to the Half-Way Covenant centered in the congregations rather than in the pulpits. A number of suggestions may be offered in explanation of this factor. Most obvious is the fact that it was a change from the practice which they were accustomed to in most of the churches. Virtually all of those who were then members had acquired their right to baptism by their parent's right and not that of their grandparents. Any change would be viewed as an innovation and contrary to accepted practice. This principle is very aptly illustrated in the Plymouth church where the pastor, Chandler Robbins, sought to abolish the practice which had been introduced by his predecessor, Nathaniel Leonard, in 1731. Robbins touched off a major controversy when he attempted to abolish this practice of forty years. The advocates of retaining the Half-Way Covenant practice used precisely the same argument for maintaining the practice in 1771 that its enemies had used against starting it in 1662. The defenders of the Half-Way Covenant in the Plymouth church in 1771 declared that "the old practice as tis called was right,"[5] even though their pastor pointed out that it had never been used in Plymouth church until the days of his predecessor.

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[3] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1855), II, 312.

[4] Joseph Bellamy, The Half-Way Covenant, A Dialogue (New Haven, 1769), in The Works of Joseph Bellamy, D. D. First Pastor of the Church in Bethlem, Conn. with a Memoir of His Life and Character, 2 vols. (Boston, 1853), II, 668.

The religious motivation of the laymen who opposed the new system was that of a deep rooted conviction that their position was necessary to preserve the purity of the church. Neither side in the controversy sought to lower the standards of Puritanism. The difficulty was over a difference of opinion as to what was the best way to preserve the standards in the face of internal pressures and a rising secularism. The issue hinged on the theory of continuity in their Covenant theology and the degree of its validity and application. The ever present agitation of the Anabaptists against any form of infant baptism could not help but make an impression on the laymen who probably had much more daily contact with the Anabaptists in their every day work world than did the ministers in their study. The Anabaptist denial of all continuity would have tended to militate against, or at least raise questions about extending the scope of continuity to those who had even less of a claim on it than did the immediate children of visible believers.

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[5] Plymouth Church Records, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, 339.

The admission of members to a limited membership on the basis of the tenets of the Synod of 1662 lowered the important emotional appeal of the relationship, and in truth probably raised serious emotions of misgivings in the persons of those who saw their children embracing the Half-Way Covenant which at best was a questionable substitute for the full covenant relationship and the genuine experience which the parents hoped and expected for their children.

Reception of the new system was further complicated by developments on the political front. The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 led to a letter from Charles II. to the Massachusetts Court under date of June 28, 1662, directing that "all persons of good and honest lives and conversations be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the said book of common prayer, and their children to baptism."[6] The same session of the Massachusetts Court which approved the findings of the Synod of 1662, also had in hand the king's orders which would have made the Half-Way Covenant entirely unnecessary if the orders had been carried out. The restoration of the monarchy also resulted in the absorption of New Haven Colony into Connecticut, and this added to the agitation in these two colonies.

In this context of political coercion two avenues of thought seem to have developed. One was that of impatience at the slowness of the officials in carrying out the king's orders, and the other was that of resistance to carrying out the orders. After July of 1664, when the royal commissioners arrived in New England to revise the general state of affairs to coincide with the royal wishes, the situation was still more aggravated. The Half-Way Covenant did not meet the demands of the royal letter and wishes, but it was a step in that direction. Opponents of the Half-Way Covenant system could view it as a symbol of ecclesiastical and political compromise, and for that reason the controversy over it may have had patriotic and political overtones not readily detectable.

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[6] [Thomas Hutchinson], A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), p. 379.

The situation certainly was not propitious for the ministers to inaugurate the Half-Way Covenant practice, and great and long was their struggle to put it into effect in their churches. Cotton Mather has eloquently summarized the difficulties which beset the ministers in trying to implement the findings of the Synod of 1662. He says:

> Very various have been the methods of the pastors to bring their churches into the desired order; many the meetings, the debates, the prayers and the fasts, with which this matter has been accomplished; and much more many the difficulties, where the matter had been so long delayed, that the retrieval was well nigh to be despaired.[7]

Mather gives us a detailed description of the machinations of one pastor in getting his church to adopt the new practice. Apparently about the year 1692, this pastor preached on the subject and then had a statement printed giving the doctrinal basis of what he proposed to do. He then had a private conference with each of those he considered as possible leaders of dissension and sought to win them to his side. When he deemed the time favorable he drew up an instrument stating what he proposed to do and the covenant he proposed to use. He saw to it that there were no public meetings or debates on the subject, and he circulated the statement of his proposal by the hands of several persons considered especially fit for the task of obtaining signatures endorsing his proposal. After they had obtained the endorsement of about ninety-five per cent of the congregation the pastor confronted the remaining members with the paper and extracted a promise from them that they would not cause any difficulty if he were to start baptizing according to the synod's recommendation.[8] Mather indicated that this latter item of obtaining an agreement from dissenters that they would not cause trouble when the policy was instituted was commonly done by the ministers. They apparently felt quite insecure on this matter.

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[7] Magnalia, II, 313.

John Higginson, the pastor of the Salem church, aided the function of the Half-Way Covenant in his church in 1665 by writing and having printed a six page Direction for a Public Profession in the Church After Private Examination by the Elders. This appears to be sort of a manual to be carefully studied by the potential Half-Way member in order to have the right answers for the elders as well as the church. It presents the minimal rudiments of the Christian faith and has no suggestions regarding experience or a work of grace. It apparently was designed to help meet a formalized requirement by a person who had very little knowledge of the Christian faith but still had to show some knowledge of the basic doctrines. Higginson was so concerned about the many persons who were barred from baptism that he actually advocated giving them a private examination and dispensing with the public profession of faith[9] which seems to have been required of Half-Way Covenant members even if they could not muster the experience required for full communion.

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[8] Ibid., II, 313-315.

The first reaction to the synod's confirmation of the principles of the Half-Way Covenant was the precipitation of a vigorous literary conflict which set the stage and prepared the way for the many controversies and difficulties that followed the attempts of the ministers to put into practice the recommendations of the Synod of 1662. The Propositions were presented to the Massachusetts Court on October 8, 1662, and before the end of the year the Cambridge press had printed the official copy. There also were two unofficial printings in England in 1662. One of these had as an Appendix Charles Chauncy's Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana which is a vigorous rebuttal of the Synod's recommendations. In 1663 John Davenport's Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth was published at Cambridge. The Preface by Increase Mather was a strong attack on the Half-Way system, but in less than ten years Mather changed his mind and wrote on the other side of the controversy. Appended to Davenport's work was Nicholas Street's Considerations Upon the Seven Propositions Concluded by the Synod Sitting at Boston, June 10, 1662. Street was Davenport's colleague at New Haven and firmly opposed to the new system.

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[9] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 261.

The replies from the synodists came in 1663 and 1664. Apparently the first weapon the synodists could muster was Thomas Shepard's The Church Membership of Children and Their Right to Baptism, which was published in 1663. This had been written by Shepard some time before his death in 1649 but never published. Now it was put forth with a Preface by his son the younger Thomas Shepard. The Preface is chiefly and emphatically directed against the Anabaptists as was the work by the senior Shepard. The first work directed specifically against the anti-synodists was John Allin's Animadversions Upon the Antisynodalia Americana in 1664. This work also was oriented somewhat against the Anabaptists. The Preface says "we see evidently that the Principles of our Dissenting Brethren give great advantages to the Antipaedobaptists, which if we be silent, will tend much to their encouragement and encrease to the hazards of our churches." Chauncy also lashed out against the Anabaptists[10] who evidently were seeking to capitalize on the Congregational quarrel and were causing both sides trouble. The third publication of the Half-Way Covenant advocates was an anonymous work entitled A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod Met at Boston in the Year 1662 . . . Against the Reply Made Thereto by the Rev. Mr. J. Davenport. This was published at Cambridge in 1664 and is generally acknowledged to be the work of Richard Mather. It has a lengthy Preface that is usually attributed to Jonathan Mitchell and which seeks to answer Increase Mather's Preface to Davenport's Another Essay. Mitchell's Preface gives a clear presentation of the thinking and desires of the synod's majority. They had feared that unless something were done there would develop a trend toward relaxing the standards for admission to full communion, and rather than do this they chose to broaden the base of baptism. Following is what might be regarded as the classic statement of the synod's thinking:

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[10] [Charles Chauncy], Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana [London, 1662], p. 16.

> In sum, we make account, that if we keep Baptism within the compass of the Non-excommunicable, and the Lord's Supper within the compass of those that have (unto charity) somewhat of the Power of Godliness (or Grace in Exercise) we shall be near about the right Middle-way of Church-Reformation. And as for the Preservation of due Purity in the Church, it is the due Exercise of Discipline that we must do that.[11]

The anti-synodists wove three basic themes into their attack. In the first place they insisted that only visible believers and their immediate seed were the proper subjects of baptism. Secondly, they endeavored to show that their position was the one held by the whole body of Congregationalists in the past and that they were the true defenders of the faith and practice of the churches. Thirdly, they modified the theory of continuity which is so prominent a part of Covenant theology.

Chauncy's Anti-Synodalia declared the subjects of baptism to be "visible believers and converts in full communion in an instituted church (being unbaptized) together with their next seed in minority."[12] The

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[11] P. 45 of the Preface to A Defence of the Answer.

[12] P. 16.

Preface declared that their position is "no other than the doctrine of all the Congregational Churches in Holland, England, Ireland, and New-England, also in New-Haven and Plimoth" and with only a few exceptions the "general practice of the churches in the Bay Patent." The Preface appeals to the sentiments of a number of early Massachusetts leaders and declares that "by these and many other testimonies it may appear, that what the Dissenters hold and defend, is the old-way of New-England, and what is now pleaded for, and to be introduced is an innovation." This last argument probably was the most telling of all, and the theme shows up many times in the subsequent controversies.

The synodists held to the view that the continuity of the covenant relation continued unless it was broken by the church or the individual. Chauncy considerably amplified the grounds of separation from the covenant relationship by insisting that in the case of certain individuals "the Lord himself discovenants them,"[13] and he listed a number of grounds for this discovenanting. The main ones are not loving Christ and not taking hold of the covenant. The following declaration shows the extent to which Chauncy went beyond the normally accepted grounds of discovenanting: "There are other grounds of breaking the covenant, besides notorious sins, and incorrigibleness therein, as not standing by faith, not laying hold of the covenant in a regular way, not bringing forth good fruit, Mat. 3. 10, and not doing righteousness."[14] It would seem from these items that the individual's hold on the covenant was precarious indeed.

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[13] Chauncy, Anti-Synodalia, p. 33.

[14] Ibid., p. 33.

rebuttal of the Synod's recommendations. In 1663 John Davenport's Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth was published at Cambridge. The Preface by Increase Mather was a strong attack on the Half-Way system, but in less than ten years Mather changed his mind and wrote on the other side of the controversy. Appended to Davenport's work was Nicholas Street's Considerations Upon the Seven Propositions Concluded by the Synod Sitting at Boston, June 10, 1662. Street was Davenport's colleague at New Haven and firmly opposed to the new system.

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[9] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 261.

John Davenport's Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth apparently made considerable impact on the thinking regarding the synod's conclusions because William Hubbard tells us that "some think that Mr. Davenport's book hath overthrown the propositions of the Synod, according to their own principles."[15] This rather guarded admission would hardly have been made unless there were a considerable supporting evidence. Davenport built on much the same line as Chauncy except that he launched a full scale attack on the theory of continuity. This attack, although still allowing for restricted infant baptism, largely transferred the basis of continuity from natural generation through the parent to supernatural generation through faith. He insisted that there is a distinction that must be made between the Old Testament order and that of the New Testament. He said that "the administration of the covenant and kingdom is not the same in all ages,"[16] and that the truth must be drawn from the New Testament rather than the Old. Davenport aptly quoted from Henry Burton, an English Congregationalist, to the effect that "it is not now under the Gospel, as it was from Abraham unto Christ . . . . But now, under the Gospel, those only are accounted Abraham's seed, who profess the faith of Abraham."[17] From this and other statements it seems that some of the English

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[15] Hubbard, General History, p. 590.

[16] John Davenport, Another Essay for Investigation of the Truth, in Answer to Two Questions Concerning 1. The Subject of Baptism. 2. The Consociation of Churches (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1663), p. 3.

[17] Ibid , p. iv. . The quotation is from Henry Burton, A Vindication of Churches Commonly Called Independent . . . (London, 1644), p. 62.

Congregationalists did not hold as firm a view of the theory of continuity as did their New England brethren, and this may be part of the reason they did not take recourse to a Half-Way Covenant principle.

Davenport's denial of the theory of continuity was clearly expressed in the following two statements: "Christian churches . . . are not capable of being propagated and continued, in a lineal succession, by natural generation, ordinarily,"[18] and "I look at believing confederate parents, not as the instrumental, but as the procreant cause, as of the child's natural being, by his generating him."[19] He challenged his opponents' views that the continuity of the church depended upon their practice of the theory of continuity and offered an alternative one of his own which expresses his basic theological position. Here is his statement:

> There be better ways to convey religion down to after-generations and to continue a nursery in Christ's vineyard, then this way of setting up such a successive membership, which Christ hath not sanctified by his institution; viz., the vigilancy and faithful care and endeavor of church-elders, and family-rulers, to fit them for regular church-fellowship in the using of all suitable means, with fervent prayer to God in Jesus Christ for his blessing upon the same, leaving the issue to his all-disposing wisdom, who worketh according to the counsel of 'his own will,' according whereunto he with-holdeth from and addeth unto the church whom he will.[20]

One of the most frequently encountered arguments advanced by the proponents of the Half-Way Covenant was that it would provide an effectual means of the church maintaining its watch care over the conduct of the oncoming generations. Davenport scorned this optimistic concept with the question of "how can it be rationally expected that they who submit not themselves to the yoke of family-government, will orderly submit themselves to Christ's yoke in church censures?"[21]

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[18] Davenport, Another Essay, p. 6.

[19] Ibid., p. 37.

[20] Ibid., p. 34.

These works by Davenport and Chauncy gave the opponents of the Half-Way Covenant system ample ammunition for use against their opponents, and it was used with telling effect. With few exceptions the advocates of the new system were faced with a long and difficult struggle before they were able to secure general acceptance of what they deemed vital for the welfare of the churches. If the directives of the king and the royal commissioners had been followed there would have been no occasion for installing the Half-Way Covenant, and the fact that it was for so long a time the subject of agitation is testimony to the practical disregard of the royal wishes. The colonists seem to have been very efficient at finding ways of circumventing the king's desires, especially if these desires affected their religion or their pocketbook.

The Plymouth Court received the recommendations of the royal commissioners on February 22, 1664/5 that "all men and women of orthodox opinions, competent knowledge, and civil lives, not scandalous, may be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and their children to baptism, if they desire it."[22] It was suggested that such persons be either taken into the existing churches or allowed to gather themselves into their own churches without disturbance. The Plymouth reply was to the effect that they would be glad to have all qualified persons come into their communion and others could have their own meetings provided they continued to support the established ministry until they had their own ministers and the area could support two congregations. It seems rather obvious that Plymouth Court intended to determine who was qualified and whether a given area could afford two churches. There is a note extant concerning one of the churches in the Plymouth jurisdiction and the reception of the Half-Way Covenant in the Yarmouth church. Thomas Thornton, an ejected English minister, became pastor of Yarmouth in 1663. In 1678 John Cotton of Plymouth church wrote to Increase Mather that "Mr. Thornton hath begun and practiced the Synod's fifth proposition in baptizing sundry. There are five or six dissenting brethren."[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 34.

[22] Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England, eds. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff and David Pulsifier, 12 vols in 10 (Boston, 1855-1861), IV, 86.

Issues closely related to the Half-Way Covenant difficulties produced much turmoil in Connecticut. The absorption of New Haven colony into Connecticut in 1662 only served to increase the field of division. At the New Haven church John Davenport and Nicholas Street were thoroughly opposed to the Half-Way Covenant and were vigorous leaders in the fight against it. At the same time the records of the Milford church, which had been part of New Haven colony, show that the Half-Way Covenant practice was actually commenced in that church in 1661 and continued without a break until 1683. This church was simply following the teaching of Peter Prudden who had been the pastor until his death in 1656 and who was a strong advocate of the practice which the synod later recommended. The fact of the adherence of the Milford church to the practice of accepting members not in full communion tends to throw some doubt on the validity of John Davenport's listing[24] of churches that were opposed to the Half-Way Covenant in 1666, because he lists the Milford church as one of those opposed to the new practice along with New Haven, Stratford, Brandford, Guilford, Norwalk, Stamford, Farmington, part of the Windsor church and possibly Norwich. There were varying degrees of interpretation of the Half-Way Covenant, and it may be that the Milford church favored the stricter phases and opposed the laxer ones.

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[23] Joseph B. Felt The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising not only Religious, but Also Moral, and Other Relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855-1862), II, 643. Felt is quoting from a Mather ms.

Agitation in Connecticut was renewed in 1664, when certain persons who were members of the Church of England sought to gain admission to the sacraments of the Congregational churches in Connecticut. The case is somewhat analagous to the Dr. Robert Child case in 1646. In both cases the vehicle of attack was a petition. Under date of October 17, 1664, a petition was presented to the Connecticut General Court signed by seven men. Four of them were from Windsor and two of them from Hartford. The town of one of the petitioners is uncertain. Two of the petitioners from Windsor,

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[24] See "Letter of John Davenport, Sr. to John Winthrop, Jr.," in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 3rd series, Vol. X, 60.

Michael Humphrey and James Eno, had been the subjects of a complaint registered with the Connecticut Court by the Windsor church in March of that year charging them with "a misdemeanor in offering violence to an established law of this colony."[25] The church withdrew the charges against the two men, but the court proceeded to indicate displeasure with their activities by declaring that "this Court expects they will readily come to the acknowledgment of their error in the paper by them presented to this church [Windsor]."[26] The two men had evidently petitioned the Windsor church concerning their church grievance, and being rebuffed there had joined other malcontents in a petition to the Connecticut Court. The petition was drawn up by William Pitkin of Hartford and is usually known as the William Pitkin petition. The timing of the petition coincided with propitious circumstances. The petition mentions the July 26, 1662, letter of Charles II. to the Massachusetts Bay colony calling for extension of the privileges of the sacraments, and in July of 1664 the royal commissioners charged with carrying out the king's wishes had arrived in New England. The petitioners also mentioned that at the last session of the court the Deputy Governor had given them encouragement to declare their grievances. The petition affirmed that they were members of the Church of England, and their reason for submitting the petition was worded as follows:

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[25] The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), I, 420.

[26] Ibid., I, 420.

> Our aggreviance is, that we and ours, are not under the due care of an orthodox ministry, that will in a due manner administer to us those ordinances, that we stand capable of, as the baptising of our children, our being admitted (as we according to Christ's order may be found meet) to the Lord's Table, and a careful watch over us in our way), and suitable dealing with us as we do well or ill.[27]

The petition requested the Connecticut Court to give them redress as follows:

> By establishing some wholesome law in this Corporation, by virtue whereof, we may both claim and receive of such officers, as are or shall be by law set over us in the church or churches, where we have our abode or residence, these forementioned privileges and advantages.
>
> Furthermore we humbly request, that for the future, no law in this corporation may be of any force to make us pay or contribute the maintenance of any minister or officer of the church that will neglect or refuse to baptise our children & to take care of us, as of such members of the church, as are under his or their charge or care.

The provisions of this petition called for much more than the Half-Way Covenant system would have granted. They called for the parish system of the Church of England and would have negated the concept of the pure church as well as allowing for a plural church system. The response of the court seems on the surface to be favorable to the petition; however in interpreting the response which the court made it should be kept in mind that their suggestions may have been more window dressing for the royal commissioners than an actual statement of the court's real desires.

Actually the court's reply seems to be a rather oblique answer to the demands of the petitioners. The answer affirmed that "the Court desires that the several officers of the respective churches, would be pleased to consider whether it be not the duty of the Court to order the churches to practice according to the premises, if they do not practice without such an order."[28] The "premises" had been stated in a preceding portion of the court's answer, and it was virtually a statement of the accepted Congregational practices except that there was no mention of relations, and even this might be allowed by the broad language of the statement.

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[27] The text of the petition is given in Appendix D and is taken from Henry R. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut . . . (New York, 1859), pp. 167-168.

The Court asked for expressions of dissent from the churches if there were any, and at least one letter of dissent is known. It is signed by Adam Blackman and Thomas Hanford "in the name and with the consent"[29] of the churches at Stratford and Norwalk. It vigorously asserted that only visible saints, that is, those who "do before the Lord and his people profess their faith and repentance" are to be admitted to the privileges of full communion.

The Pitkin petition evidently received no effective consideration because on November 22, 1666, a delegation of six dissidents, including Pitkin and John Stedman who had both signed the petition, called on John Whiting, the minister of the Hartford church, and requested communion with the Hartford church in all of the ordinances. When asked for the grounds of their admission they mentioned the membership in the Church of England and indicated a willingness to do anything that might be required beyond this. Whiting evaded the issue and promised an answer later on. It is fairly evident that he was determined to exclude them.[30]

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[28] The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), I, 437.

[29] George Leon Walker, History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1883 (Hartford, 1884), p. 198. He is quoting from the letter.

That the Half-Way Covenant issue was boiling in Connecticut is shown by the fact that John Warham of Windsor, who had commenced the practice January 31, 1657/8, discontinued it on March 19, 1664/5, because "he had met with such arguments against the practice, concerning the baptizing of members' children."[31]

The year 1666 was one that saw major activities concerning the Half-Way Covenant issue in Connecticut. In April of that year Abraham Pierson, pastor of the Branford church, made arrangements for most of his church together with thirty families from Milford and elements of the churches of Guilford and New Haven to migrate to New Jersey. The following year this was carried out and Newark was established by these migrants. Other issues figured in the migration, but one of the basic ones appears to have been a dislike of the Half-Way Covenant and a fear that it might be forced upon them if they remained in the Conneoticut jurisdiction.[32]

Starting in January, 1665/6, the church at Stratford, Connecticut, was embroiled in a controversy over starting the use of the Half-Way

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[30] Ibid., p. 200. He is quoting from the "Ms. of the Connecticut Ecclesiastical Records, I, 10."

[31] Stiles, Windsor p. 172. He is quoting from the church records.

[32] See discussions in S. Leroy Blake, The Separates or Strict Congregationalists of New England (Boston, 1902), pp. 126-127 and Timothy Phelps Gillett, The Past and the Present, in the Secular and Religious History of the Congregational Church and Society of Branford (New Haven, 1858), pp. 7-9.

Covenant.[33] The pastor, Israel Chauncy, settled in 1665, opposed the practice and would not adopt it, but at the same time a large number of his members together with many of the town favored the practice. On June 1, 1666, Mr. Chauncy was presented with a request purported to be from the town and signed by four men on the town's behalf. It included the following specific request:

> More particularly we desire that all they that profess faith and obedience to the rules of Christ not scandalous in life and do present themselves in owning the covenant wherein they have given themselves unto the Lord in baptism may be admitted and accounted members of the church and under the care and discipline thereof as other members and have their children baptized. Yet notwithstanding we desire not that any thus admitted may approach unto the Lord's table till in and by examination and due trial they make testimony unto the judgment of charity of their fitness thereunto.[34]

Chauncy refused to yield, and the controversy progressed to the point where the Connecticut Court had to forbid any more disturbances in the church. The Court ordered the matter put to a vote of the town, and on October 14, 1667, the town voted by a margin of eighty-six to fifty-two to continue Mr. Chauncy in his position.[35] Agitation continued, and when the Court allowed dissidents to form separate churches, the group in favor of the Half-Way Covenant did so under Zechariah Walker and in 1670 formed the church at Woodbury, Connecticut.

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[33] This was the basic issue according to William Cothren, History of Ancient Woodbury, Connecticut, 3 vols. (Waterbury, Conn., 1871) I, 113. The issues were very confused, but Cothren concludes that the fundamental question was "whether the 'Half-way Covenant Practice' should be introduced into the church."

[34] Cothren, Woodbury, I, 119.

[35] Connecticut Records, II, 74.

The Woodbury church seems to be noteworthy for the requirements for church admission which it instituted. The church records do not show any Half-Way Covenant admissions until 1751. Rather it appears from a study of the church records that the requirement for admission to full communion was that of a satisfactory life and knowledge of the essentials of the Christian religion. There is no indication in the records of the earlier period that a relation of experience was needed or asked for as a condition for admission to full communion.[36] In this respect the church reverted to the earliest New England practice and anticipated the practice which would become universal after the Half-Way Covenant scheme was abandoned. They thus preceded the more famous Brattle Street church practice by nearly twenty-nine years. The Stratford church from which the Woodbury church had seceded did not adopt the Half-Way Covenant until 1680.[37]

The reception of the Half-Way Covenant system in Massachusetts was likewise attended by much difficulty. The Court recommended the results of the Synod of 1662 to the churches and did nothing to implement the desires of the king for wider admission to the sacraments. The overwhelming vote in the synod for the system indicates the sentiments of the Massachusetts clergy, but lay opposition made the adoption of the practices long and difficult.

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[36] See the "Woodbury Church Records," pp. 1-6. Transcription by the Colonial Dames Society.

[37] See "Stratford Congregational Church Records," p. 82. Transcription by the Colonial Dames Society.

Richard Mather of Dorchester, one of the most aggressive proponents of the Half-Way system, experienced the same kind of difficulty as the other ministers, and the difficulties which followed the 1657 assembly's recommendations were continued. The Dorchester church did not formally adopt the Half-Way Covenant until 1677;[38] however from the church records it can be shown that elements of the system were apparently practiced long before its formal adoption and that the practice was attended with much difficulty and agitation. Interpretation of the records is fraught with difficulty because of uncertainty as to what the recorder had in mind with certain designations and possible changes in meaning from one recorder to another. The presence of certain categories in the entries does seem to have significance however. Starting in 1662, distinctions were carried between admissions and admissions to full communion. Two persons were listed as admitted that year and six were listed as admitted to full communion. The next year in addition to the regular listing of those dismissed there was added the category of those dismissed not in full communion. These two categories were carried through the year 1695. With the formal approval of the Half-Way Covenant in 1677 the category of owned the covenant was added and the other two categories were also continued. In 1677 the records show a big spurt in membership listings of all classification. That year there were eleven listed under admissions, eleven under admitted to full communion and thirty-nine under those who owned the covenant and were subject to church discipline. These latter names were added as a result of a strong exhortation and effort on the part of the pastor to get the children of the church to own their parents' covenant. After the 1677 admissions there were no more Half-Way Covenant admissions listed until 1682 when there were four. In 1696 there were sixty admissions in this category and in 1700 there were one hundred.

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[38] Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734, ed., Arthur B. Ellis (Boston, 1891), pp. 69-75 gives the details.

There is also evident in the Dorchester records a certain effort to avoid recourse to the Half-Way Covenant both by lowering the requirements for admission to full communion and by trying to persuade the candidates to try for full communion. In 1664 and 1665 efforts were made to modify the admissions practice so that the relations of experience could be made in private, written out, and then read in public. It was finally left to the discretion of the church officers as to which way it should be done. In 1665 one Robert Spurs was admitted to membership and desired that his two grown daughters, one married, be baptized. Some of the brethren objected that adults should "manifest faith and repentance before they should be baptized."[39] The issue was postponed to the following Sunday when it was again debated and the objecting brethren finally reluctantly agreed to allow Mather to baptize them. In 1668 a woman asked to have her two children baptized, she being a member of the church by her parent's covenant.

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[39] Ibid., p. 68.

"After much agitation" Mather was directed to see if the woman would not join in full communion. Her reply was that "she did not judge herself worthy or as yet fit for the Lord's Supper and therefore durst not adventure upon it."[40]

The Charlestown church seems to have approved the Half-Way covenant without incident. The church records show that on February 4, 1662/3, the results of the synod were read and discussed in the church. Over three-fourths of the brethren present are credited with speaking in favor of it and none spoke against it. On November 27, 1663, the church adopted the recommendations of the synod without a dissenting vote by the affirmation of silence. That contrary opinion was expected is seen in the fact that after the subject was propounded and accepted by the affirmation of silence a second opportunity was given for objections, but there were none. This seems clearly to indicate a certain amount of uneasiness on the part of the church officials as to the true sentiment of the congregation.[41]

The Salem church records show that this church received the printed copy of the results of the Synod of 1662 on January 12, 1662/3. In July of 1664 the pastor preached on the general subject of the covenant relation of the children and after the sermon announced that there were four of the children of the church who desired baptism for their children. In his plea for permission to baptize these children he noted that the matter "had been in debate at times in this church this thirteen years." The recorder then presented the pastor's description of his predicament:

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[40] Ibid., p. 76.

[41] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 301, 310, 352 gives the details from the church records.

> The Pastor also acquainted the Church with the straight he was in, many of the children of the covenant claiming baptism for their children, which he knew not how to deny, and yet with respect unto some brethren that were otherwise minded he had forborn as long as he could, but truly he did not see how he should be able to hold it long except he might have liberty to act in a peaceable way in this matter of baptizing the children of the covenant according to his own judgment, and according to the Scriptures.[42]

It can be noted here that there was no appeal to the results of the Synod of 1662. This omission would seem to indicate that perhaps the matter of the synod was not a very popular subject in the Salem church. Early in September of 1664 there "was a meeting of the church for the reading of the Propositions of the Synod touching Baptism and consociation of churches,"[43] but it produced no satisfactory conclusions. It was not until July of 1665 that the matter was sufficiently approved for the pastor to start the first Half-Way Covenant baptisms in the Salem church,[44] and all the points of difficulty were not ironed out until 1684.[45]

The foregoing incidents show that the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant was slow and tortuous in many of the churches. Lay resistance rooted in opposition to change and linked to the ideal of the pure church was strengthened by a distrust of synods. All of these factors were buttressed by the activities of some very able ministers who were comparatively few in number but gave a strong intellectual leadership to the anti-synodists. Some major battles had to be fought, and death had to remove some of the key leaders before the new practice could gain the ascendancy in the churches.

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[42] Daniel Appleton White, New England Congregationalism in Its Origin and Purity, Illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject (Salem, 1861), p. 62. The quotations are from the church records.

[43] Ibid., p. 59.

[44] Ibid., pp. 49-50, 60-61.

[45] Ibid., p. 92.

CHAPTER IX

HARTFORD AND BOSTON CHURCH CONTROVERSIES

Issues centering directly on the matter of the Half-Way Covenant caused major controversies and divisions in the Hartford and Boston First churches, and these controversies in turn convulsed the respective colonies. The Hartford church was the first of the two to be rocked by difficulties, and as it was the leading church of Connecticut colony its troubles were a matter of concern throughout the colony and served as a focal point for divergent opinions to gain expression. John Whiting, the senior pastor at Hartford, firmly opposed some of the laxer Half-Way Covenant practices, but his younger colleague, Joseph Haynes, favored the Half-Way Covenant practices and sought to put them into effect in the church by an abrupt challenge to Whiting. Haynes' father had served many terms as governor of the colony, and the family was quite influential. John Davenport appears to have kept in close contact with the developments in the Hartford church and has given us a considerable amount of detail on the matter in a letter which he wrote to Governor Winthrop of Connecticut.[1]

On one occasion when it was Haynes' turn to preach he sent three emissaries to Whiting for the purpose of informing him that Haynes was going to "preach about his way of baptizing" and intended to commence the same practice on the day he preached. He proceeded accordingly, but Whiting stopped the baptismal service. There followed a considerable exchange of words on the subject. John Warham of Windsor was a visitor there and attempted to speak but was silenced as an outsider. Davenport's words would seem to indicate that Winthrop was present in the service for he says "yourself prudently concluded that that day was not a fit season to begin their practice, seeing it was not consented to but opposed." Possibly Winthrop acted in his official capacity and stopped the affair. Davenport made a strong plea for Winthrop to help stem the rising tide before it was too late. In a Postscript Davenport said that Nicholas Street concurred fully with his views and desired a synod to settle the matter. There was an indication in Davenport's presentation that possibly the issue did not so much concern the baptizing of the infants of the church as it did the extension of this privilege to those beyond a blood connection. He noted that the esteemed Hooker opposed the baptizing of grandchildren by their grandfather's right, and then he said "much more would he have decried the baptising of adopted children, by their adoptants right: most of all, the baptising of servants, born in the house, or bought with monie . . . unless they have spiritual right, by being regularly joined to the church, according to the Gospel-rules."

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[1] "Letter of John Davenport, Sr., to John Winthrop, Jr.," in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 3rd series, Vol. X, 60-62. The letter is dated "14d of the 4th m. 1666."

The controversy appears to have continued unabated in the Hartford church, and a similar one apparently raged in the Wethersfield church. At their October 11, 1666, meeting the Connecticut General Court realized the magnitude of the difficulties and decided "to consider of some way or means to bring those ecclesiastical matters that are in difference in the several plantations to an issue."[2] Their decision was to call a synod to meet at Hartford on the third Wednesday of May, 1667, for the purpose of discussing seventeen questions propounded by the court. Copies of the questions were directed to be sent to each minister in the colony, and all of the churches were asked to abstain from controversy until the proposed synod could issue its recommendations. All the preaching elders and ministers formally settled in the colony were ordered to attend. In addition to these Connecticut ministers, four ministers from Massachusetts were also asked to be present. These were Jonathan Mitchell, Edmund Browne, John Sherman and Pelatiah Glover. Mitchell and Sherman had been called to attend the Massachusetts Assembly of 1657, and Mitchell had been one of the leaders of the Massachusetts Synod of 1662.

The first two of the seventeen questions were much the same as the two questions submitted to the Massachusetts Synod of 1662. All of the first seven questions were closely related to the issues of baptism and church membership. The text of the first seven questions vividly shows the nature of the baptismal agitation in Connecticut:

> 1. Whether federal holiness or covenant interest be not the proper grounds of baptism.
> 2. Whether communion of churches, as such, be not warrantable by the word of God.

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[2] Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), II, 53.

> 3. Whether the adult seed of visible believers not cast out be not true members and the subjects of church watch.
>
> 4. Whether ministerial officers are not as truly bound to baptize the visible disciples of Christ providentially settled amongst them, as officially to preach the word.
>
> 5. Whether settled inhabitants in the country, being members of other churches, should have their children baptized amongst us without themselves first orderly joining in churches here.
>
> 6. Whether membership in a particular instituted church be not essentially requisite under the gospel to intitle to baptism.
>
> 7. Whether adopted children and such as are bought with money are covenant seed.[3]

The remaining ten questions center on matters of church polity, and almost every one of them speaks of the difference between Congregational and Presbyterian polity. This is summarized in the last question which asks "whether it be not justifiable by the word of God that civil authority indulge Congregational and Presbiterian churches, and their discipline in the churches."[4] Perhaps this suggestion hints at the inclination of the court and points to their final solution of the matter three years later when they voted for considerable latitude in the established churches but without capitulation to the Presbyterian forces.

At its May 9, 1667, session the Court changed the title of the scheduled conclave from synod to assembly. No reason is given for the change, but it may very well have been changed to agree with the accepted Congregational principle of the Cambridge Platform that a synod must be made up of ministers and laymen. It is also possible that hostility to the idea of a synod dictated the change in name.

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[3] Ibid., II, 54.

[4] Ibid., II, 55.

Almost all that is known of this assembly is reported by Simon Bradstreet, a Congregational minister, who recorded the following:

> This year there was a Synod called at Hartford to discuss some points concerning baptism, and church discipline, but nothing was concluded, the Congregational party, which was the greatest, violently opposing the Presbyterian. There was this year and diverse years foregoing, great contentions in divers of the churches concerning these things.[5]

Meeting at Hartford September 15, 1667, the Commissioners of the United Colonies had recommended that when matters of common concern in faith and order arose they should be settled by a council or synod of all the colonies meeting at or near Boston. The Connecticut Court's session of October 10, 1667, received a request signed by John Warham, Samuel Hooker and John Whiting which claimed to express the desires of the ministerial assembly for a more general meeting than the one prescribed by the court's order. The Court agreed with this idea and called for a general meeting of the teaching elders or ministers of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Plymouth.[6] It was directed that the churches were to pay the expenses of their own delegates. Joseph Haynes of Hartford and Gershom Bulkley of Wethersfield protested this action to the Court and denied that the assembly had asked for a larger council.[7] It is obvious from the names on the petitions that the Half-Way Covenant advocates did not want the larger council, and the opponents favored it.

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[5] Simon Bradstreet, "Bradstreet's Journal," in New England Historical and Genealogical Register, IX (1855), 44.

[6] See Connecticut Records, II, 69-70 for details.

Nothing came from the Court's call for a general council. The correspondence[8] of the Massachusetts Court shows decided reluctance to enter into the matter because some of the issues were confined to Connecticut in their estimation. They asked for considerable clarification before they acted. Plymouth colony seems to have completely ignored the matter. At its May 16, 1668, session, the Connecticut Court appointed a committee composed of James Fitch, Gershom Bulkley, Joseph Eliot and Samuel Wakeman to meet on the following June 8th or 9th for the purpose of trying to devise some means of settling the difficulties "in matters of discipline respecting membership and baptism etc."[9] At the May 13, 1669, session the committee's report was read and left on file. The next item in the Court's records tells of the appointment of seven laymen to a committee "to consider and prepare some thing for the consideration of the Court, respecting ecclesiastical matters."[10] Nothing further was said concerning this lay committee, but shortly after its appointment the Court issued a declaration saying that it approved of the Congregational churches as constituted, but in the interest of peace and harmony they proclaimed:

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[7] Benjamin Trumbull, A Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of Its First Planters from England in the Year 1630, to the Year 1764; and to the Close of the Indian Wars, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1818), I, 458.

[8] Connecticut Records, II, 517, Appendix iv.

[9] Ibid., II, 84.

[10] Ibid., II, 107.

> This Court doth declare that all such persons being also approved according to law as orthodox and sound in the fundamentals of Christian religion may have allowance of their persuasion and profession in church ways or assemblies without disturbance.[11]

This order of the Court was in effect a declaration of tolerance for both the advocates of the older stricter policies and the advocates of the newer practices and opened the door for dissidents to establish their own churches. At its October 14, 1669, session, the Court approved the petition of Mr. Whiting and his followers for permission to establish another church wherein they could follow their practices without disturbance. Four of the ten assistants and fourteen of the thirty-six deputies voted against this petition,[12] and this vote indicated a considerable opposition to the new policy of toleration.

February 12, 1669/70, the Hartford Second church was formed under Whiting and the long controversy over the Half-Way Covenant was settled. It was rather ironic that at their formation the church records listed their original membership as being thirty-three in full communion and thirty-six not in full communion. The subsequent accessions are all listed in full communion.[13] The status of those not in full communion cannot be determined, apparently, but they may have been children of the church whose names were listed for the sake of a complete roster. If they are to be construed as Half-Way Covenant members the action may have been simply an expediency to get the new church started by allowing the limited membership of the grown children of the founders. An alternative to this idea would be to suggest that this is a possible confirmation of the suggestion offered earlier in connection with John Davenport's statements which might indicate that the real issue in the Hartford church was not so much a matter involving blood relationship, but rather a question concerning the eligibility of adopted children and children of servants; however, absence of any continuation of the Half-Way Covenant system in the church records argues against such a view.

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[11] Ibid., II, 109.

[12] Ibid., II, 120.

[13] For the data from the church records see Edwin Pond Parker, History of the Second Church of Christ in Hartford (Hartford, 1892), pp. 288, 290-291.

The decision of the Connecticut Court provided that from that time onward the two systems could live side by side in Connecticut, and this seems to have been the only way that peace could be restored to the troubled churches. From now on the Connecticut churches would be divided into two kinds of Congregational churches known as the large who favored the Half-Way Covenant practices and the strict who opposed them.

The greatest of all the controversies caused by the Half-Way Covenant started in the First Church of Boston, and it had that church as its focal point as it spread throughout the entire colony and appears to have caused more turmoil than did the controversy in the Hartford First Church. The status of the Half-Way Covenant practice in the Boston church between 1662 and 1669 is rather uncertain. It has been claimed that "under the influence of Wilson, the First Church had assented to the Half-Way Covenant."[14] According to the church records[15] the Half-Way Covenant was not formally adopted until March 3, 1730/1; however, it is entirely possible that it was informally practiced in this church as it was in others. Statements relative to the matter by several members of the church are expressed in such general language that it is difficult to determine whether they are making a specific reference to their church or commenting on the New England churches in general.

In 1664, John Hull, a leading layman of the Boston church, bemoaned the fact that "non-acknowledgment of the children of the church to be members thereof, nor taking care that their knowledge and life might answer their relation, is also manifest."[16] If this is a specific reference to the Boston church it would seem to indicate that the Half-Way Covenant principles were not being applied in that church. A deathbed statement by John Wilson, the Boston pastor, is reported by Nathaniel Morton of Plymouth. It is a general statement indicating the troubles besetting the ministers, but may to a certain extent reflect the situation in Wilson's own church, and if so, it would seem to indicate that the Half-Way Covenant scheme was being applied but with considerable dissension and opposition. The occasion for Wilson's remarks was a visit by a group of elders to his bedside. They asked him what he regarded as the cause of the divine displeasure which they thought was being visited upon the country. His reply listed Separation, Anabaptism and Corahism. He explained the last item as that of the people rising up against their ministers and elders as Corah had done in the days of Moses. Concerning the criticism of the ministers he says it is:

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[14] Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868, ed. Richard D. Pierce, 3 vols. in Collections of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, vols. 39-41 (Boston, 1961), I, xxxii. See also xxxi, xxxiii.

[15] Ibid., I, 161 See also II, 400.

[16] John Hull, "Diary of John Hull," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, III, 212.

> As if they took too much upon them, when indeed they do but rule for Christ, and according to Christ; (saith he) it is nothing for a brother to stand up, and oppose without scripture or reason, the doctrine and word of the Elder, saying, (I am not satisfied) etc. And hence, if he do not like the administration, (be it baptism or the like) he will then turn his back upon God and his ordinances, and go away, etc. And (saith he) for our neglect of baptizing the children of the church, those that some call Grandchildren, I think God is provoked by it.[17]

Wilson then lists a fourth cause of divine displeasure. This is "the making light of, and not subjecting to the authority of Synods, without which the Church cannot long subsist."[18] This subject of the authority of synods was one of the most sensitive areas in Congregationalism and was a source of major controversy for many years. The democratic concept inherent in their form of church government was a cherished one, and one that motivated its devotees to oppose fiercely all attempts to impose synodical coercion upon the individual church. The ministers for the most part were in favor of synodical authority because it would, if recognized, give them a weapon to coerce dissident minorities and force a comfortable conformity in their churches. The synodical controversy appears to be an important component of the difficulties experienced in inaugurating Half-Way Covenant practices in the churches. The relationship seems to be quite real although not always evident. The apparent line of relationship seems to be one of association. The Half-Way Covenant was formulated by an assembly and confirmed by a synod and was almost exclusively the product of ministerial activities. Most of the ministers favored the Half-Way Covenant and sought to impose it upon the churches where a considerable body of laymen opposed it. Much of the ministerial basis of appeal was to the recommendations of the synod. Thus a chain of relationship was set up which tended to identify the ministers, the synod and the Half-Way Covenant as a system on the one hand, and opposed to it were the older conventional practice, the laymen and the democratic concept of church government.

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[17] Nathaniel Morton, New England's Memorial (New York, 1937), pp. 183-184.

[18] Ibid., p. 184.

Through much of its early history there is evident in the First Church of Boston an antipathy to synodical action. The Boston church had been persuaded to take part in the Synod of 1648 after considerable difficulty. Its members in the court had voted against the adoption of the Cambridge Platform, and in 1679, the church voted to send delegates to the synod of that year, but at the same time they expressed their doubts as to the necessity for the synod. The two ministers, Mayo and Increase Mather, of its sister church, the Second Church in Boston, had been very active in the Synod of 1662 in opposing the majority view that confirmed the Half-Way Covenant.

Cotton Mather tells us that before John Wilson died the Boston First Church "had after much agitation, so far begun to attend the discipline directed in the doctrine of the synod, that they proceeded ecclesiastically to censure the adult children of several communicants for scandals, whereinto they had fallen."[19] This of itself was enough to stir up considerable opposition from the families affected, and tends to show that ample seed for a controversy had been sown in the Boston church.

John Wilson died August 7, 1667, and the Boston Church was faced with the task of obtaining a new minister in his place. On September 24, 1667, the church voted to extend a call to John Davenport of New Haven. This touched off a squabble with the New Haven church, who did not want to lose their pastor, but this was very mild compared to the turmoil that this call generated in the Boston church and the Massachusetts colony. Cotton Mather evaluated Wilson as one of the "more synodial ministers" and Davenport as "the greatest of the anti-synodists."[20] It is evident that the anti-synod faction in the Boston church was in a majority and determined to call the man who was regarded as the leading spokesman for its views.

Vigorous opposition to the call of Davenport was offered by thirty brethren of the church who favored the synod and its views and opposed

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[19] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England from its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1853-1855), II, 312.

[20] Ibid., II, 312.

Davenport because of his opposition to the synod, but "the major part of the church, by far"[21] elected Davenport as their pastor. He was ordained to their church December 9, 1668.[22] Those opposed to his call had evidently sought to be dismissed from their church membership before Davenport's ordination. John Hull tells us that "the dissenting brethren humbly, earnestly, and frequently entreated for their dismission before the ordination, but could not obtain it; neither could they, without much trouble, enjoy communion at the table."[23]

Agitation in the church continued, and on February 12, 1668/9, two of the deacons were dismissed from their office "for setting there [sic] hands with other brethren to desire their dismission from the church because the church had chosen Mr. Davenport for their pastor."[24] The chronology of developments for the next few months is a bit confused but seems to have something of this order. On March 12, 1668/9, the dissenters formed the Third Church of Boston which is more commonly known as the Old South Church. They had the support of eight of the fourteen magistrates in this move, and the support of all but three of the nearby ministers.[25] On

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[21] Ibid., II, 312.

[22] Records of the First Church in Boston, II, 347.

[23] John Hull, "Diary of John Hull," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, III, 228.

[24] Records of the First Church in Boston, I, 62.

[25] Hull's "Diary," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, III, 229 gives the details. The magistrates who opposed were Richard Bellingham, Samuel Symonds, William Hathorne, John Leverett, Eleazar Lusher and Edward Tyng. Hull designates the opposing ministers as "J. A , J. D., and S. M." Quite likely the first two were James Allen and John Davenport of the First Church.

March 29, 1669, the First Church voted "unanimously"[26] not to give the seceders their requested dismissal from their First Church membership. The dissenters asked for help, and their action in forming the Third Church was implemented "by the aid of the first well-marked (and perhaps the most important) Ex-parte council ever held in New England."[27] The records of the Roxbury church have this notation concerning the council:

> A great Assemblie of Elders and Messengers of several Churches in the Bay, who upon the Call of the Dissenting Brethren at Boston, met together to consider and advise what to do. They judged that the Dissenting Brethren might seasonably make use of their Christian libertie unto a regular coalition in another church body. 13, 2 moneth 1669.[28]

So intense was the feeling in the Boston First Church concerning the action of the council that, as Hull tells us, "the church of Boston would not let him [Richard Mather] into the doors when he, with sundry others, waited with a letter from the council to them."[29]

The approval of the council cleared the way for the dissenters to continue with their church organization, but far from settling the difficulty in Boston, the formation of the Third Church only aroused wider controversy as the entire colony took sides on the issue between the two churches. John Davenport preached the election sermon in the spring of 1669, and the deputies of the Massachusetts Court thanked him for it. The sermon appeared innocent of intent to build partisan advantage, but it drew a sharp rebuke from the magistrates who complained that the sermon had many passages "ill resented by the Reverend Elders of other churches and many serious persons."[30]

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[26] Records of the First Church in Boston, I, 62.

[27] Henry Martin Dexter, The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature (New York, 1880), p. 474.

[28] "Roxbury Church Records," in A Report of the Record Commissioners Containing the Roxbury Land and Church Records, (Boston, 1884), p. 207.

[29] John Hull, "Diary of John Hull," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, III, 229.

The symbol of the contention became the actual construction of a building for the Third Church. Controversy became so intense that in July, 1669, Governor Bellingham called a council fearing, as his order says, "a sudden tumult"[31] over the construction of the Third Church. Physical violence was avoided, but agitation continued without any abatement. At the May, 1670, session of the Massachusetts General Court, the House of Deputies appointed a special committee to inquire into the causes of the ills which were besetting the land. This was clearly a move on the part of the anti-synodist party to discredit their opponents. The committee brought back a report which was most emphatically anti-synodical and strongly anti-ministerial. Among the most striking of the long list of evils which they deplored were these: "innovation in doctrine and worship, opinion and practice, an invasion of the rights liberties and privileges of churches, an usurpation of a lordly and prelatical power over God's heritage."[32] The action of setting up the Third Church was roundly condemned, and the court voted a censure of the synodical party.[33] This act of the deputies may be interpreted as a last desperate attempt on the part of the anti-synodical party to make their case because their leader, John Davenport, had died suddenly on March 15, 1670. Charles Chauncy, their other leader, was seventy-nine, and apparently there were no younger ministers of their persuasion with sufficient stature to take the place of these men.

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[30] Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising Not Only Religious, but also moral, and other relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855-1862), II, 438. Felt gives as the source of this quotation "Mass. Archives, Eccl. vol. i, p. 7."

[31] Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, I, 232.

A high tide of anti-clerical sentiment was running in the colony of Massachusetts Bay as is clearly shown by the deputies' action. The presence of this sentiment is especially commented on by Thomas Hutchinson who notes that "Mr. Flint, the minister of Dorchester, in his diary, whilst this court [May, 1670] was sitting has this observation: 'A spirit of division, persecution and oppressing God's ministers and precious saints, is the sin which is unseen and none bears witness against.'"[34] This fact is also attested by a letter which Samuel Danforth, minister of Roxbury, wrote to his brother on March 30, 1670, in which he registers this complaint:

> The truth is, matters are so circumstanced that a man can hardly come into any company and enter into any discourse, but before he is aware he finds himself in the like fan and sieve, as that wherein Satan winnowed Peter in the high priest's hall. In

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[32] Ibid., I, 232.

[33] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), IV, Pt. 2, 493.

[34] Hutchinson, History of Massachusetts Bay, I, 232, footnote.

> so much that many times I am glad of any fair excuse for my abode at home.[35]

At the next session of the General Court the picture was greatly changed because the ministers had struck back with a vengeance. A lengthy protest signed by fifteen ministers was presented to the Court at Boston. It reflects the magnitude of the turmoil in the land and especially the extent to which the ministers felt wronged by the action of the court in 1670. The ministers asserted their full allegiance to the original doctrines and practices of the churches and specifically took exception to the findings of the committee and the actions of the deputies of the last Court in approving the "unjust charge of innovation, which with a loud cry and clamour of apostacy, is laid upon the generality of the ministry of these churches."[36] The ministers especially condemned the following:

> The votes of the major part of the house thereupon, concluding, determining, and declaring that declension from the primitive foundation work, innovation in doctrine and worship, opinion and practice, and invasion of the rights, liberties, and privileges of the churches . . . plainly insinuating that the ministry are the Achan . . . giving instance in the late solemn transaction of churches and elders in the constitution of the third church in Boston, as irregular, illegal, and disorderly, and so a sufficient signal of the whole discovery.[37]

It is very clear that the ministers had been thoroughly riled by the action of the previous House of Deputies. They summarized their objections under six main points, and two of these clearly show the role of the Half-Way Covenant issue in the controversy:

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[35] "Letter of Samuel Danforth to His Brother Thomas," in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 1873-1875 (Boston, 1875), p. 306.

[36] Records of Massachusetts Bay, IV, Pt. 2, 490.

[37] Ibid., IV, Pt. 2, 490.

> 3. It scandalizeth the professed and declared doctrine of baptism, insinuating that no children ought to be baptized but such whose parents have given such evidence of the grace of faith to the church, as thereupon they are admitted to full communion in instituted churches.
>
> 4. It overthrows the constitution of our congregational churches, by denying the membership of church children, when adult, as not having the material nor formal cause of church membership.[38]

The ministers deplored the adverse effects which the court's action had had on their ministry, and their words clearly verify the presence of what they interpreted as a strong anti-ministerial sentiment. Their lamentation is this:

> How much an anti-ministerial spirit hath been strengthened and emboldened, how much the hearts and hands of many that labor in the work of the ministry hath been weakened, how much the spirits of many have been prejudiced against their instructors, and filled with groundless jealousies and suspicions by the misrepresenting and scandalizing of elders to their churches.[39]

The protest of the fifteen ministers was presented to the court on May 31, and on June 4, 1671, the court acted on it. The Court reaffirmed its power to act and then admitted to some ill-advised action on the part of the previous court. The Court, in effect, apologized to the ministers for the affront and gave them a clean bill of health. The case of the Boston church split is specifically mentioned twice in the ministers' protest and twice in the Court's reversal of its former stand, and this shows the central role which that controversy played in the whole affair. The reason for the Court's reversal is explained by Hutchinson who gives the following analysis:

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[38] Ibid., IV, Pt. 2, 491.

[39] Ibid., IV, Pt. 2, 492. The petition was signed by Edmond Broune, John War, Samuel Whiting, John Allin, Tho. Thatcher, John Higginson, John Sherman, Tho. Cobbet, Seaborn Cotton, Tho. Shepard, Samuel Philipps, William Hubbard, Antipas Newman, Samuel Torrey and Samuel Whiting, Jr.

> This change of sentiments in the court was owing to the change of persons in the house of deputies, there being of the fifty members, the number of the house this year, twenty only who were of the house the year before; and this is an evidence of the whole colony's being engaged in this dispute.[40]

Hutchinson gives extensive treatment to the affair which he regards as significant, and his explanation is a good presentation of the workings of the relationship between church and state in Colonial Massachusetts:

> I have been more particular in relating this transaction, because it gives us a pretty good idea of the connection between the civil and ecclesiastical power, the churches, notwithstanding their claim to independency being liable to control as their proceedings were disproved by the civil magistrate, and on the other hand, the magistrates, who were annualy elected, being sometimes liable to be displaced by the influence of the clergy in elections, when their proceedings were supposed to bear hard upon the liberties of the churches, for the clergy still retained a great proportion of the weight they had at the beginning.[41]

Certain tentative conclusions concerning the relative strength of the Half-Way Covenant movement can be suggested from the outcome of the Boston church split and the subsequent related events. The aroused ministers evidently put on a strong election drive to get their candidates elected and succeeded. This would seem to show that the majority of the electors were not anti-ministerial, and it tends to show that the majority of them probably favored the Half-Way Covenant position although this conclusion must be tempered by the possibility that some of the aroused ministers who opposed the Half-Way Covenant were willing to sacrifice this conviction in favor of a defence of the profession as a whole. A general conclusion seems to indicate that the ministers were overwhelmingly in favor of the Half-Way Covenant, and the laymen favored it by a very narrow majority. The Half-Way Covenant was opposed by a vigorous and determined minority who usually were able to control the situation unless the ministers put on a determined effort to arouse their slight majority into action.

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[40] Hutchinson, History of Massachusetts Bay, I, 234.

[41] Ibid., I, 234.

The heat of the controversy seems to have spent itself with the retraction of the court which left the ministerial-synodical-Half-Way Covenant faction victorious. Agitation continued, but the backbone of the opposition appears to have been broken. The pathway of the advocates of the Half-Way Covenant seems to be much smoother from this time onward. For the next few years the election sermons hammer away against the dissenters who dared to rebel against ministerial authority, but gradually the theme becomes the more general one of a lamentation against declining morality and the lack of respect for ministerial messages.

The principal literary result of the controversy was the stimulation of Increase Mather to write his First Principles of New England. The Preface is dated March 1, 1671, although the book was not published until 1675. It was a major effort to clear the advocates of the Half-Way Covenant of the charge of apostacy and declension from first principles. In 1675

Mather also published his Discourse Concerning the Subject of Baptism. In 1662, Mather had been one of the leading opponents of the Half-Way Covenant, but Jonathan Mitchell had convinced him of his error and now he was one of the strongest advocates of the new system. Mather's experience was symptomatic of the trend which was to prevail for many years.

CHAPTER X

PRACTICES

The basic purpose of the Half-Way Covenant was to provide for the continued association of children and grandchildren with the church even though the immediate parent could not qualify for church membership. By means of the Half-Way Covenant system it was felt that the contacts between the church and the posterity of church members could be maintained. This was to be provided by means of a limited church membership which conveyed the right to baptism. The parents and children were considered under the watch care of the church and beneficiaries of the nurture of the church. This was expected to lead eventually to full communion for the parents and their children in turn as they went through the process of qualifying themselves. Associated with this institution was a considerable body of practices that grew up with its use.

Some of the practices were fairly uniform and widespread, and others had only application in a few or perhaps only one church. Hints of the practices have to be gleaned from scattered references that may be many years apart in time and may have scattered geographic application. Many of the references are only a casual note on a special problem that presented itself. In the absence of any uniformity of practice and without any authoritative treatment of the subject available it is hoped that some idea of the application of Half-Way Covenant principles to New England church life can be conveyed by the following discussion of practices.

Half-Way Covenant membership did not come automatically when a child reached a certain age, but rather it required a definite overt act on the part of the candidate to be received as a Half-Way covenant member. The theory of covenant continuity held by the majority of New England Congregationalists and definitely held by those congregations which practiced the Half-Way Covenant was that the child was a member of the church by virtue of at least one of his parents being in covenant relationship with God and the church, and this membership was deemed permanent unless the individual was excommunicated or the church ceased to exist. The child was baptized by the right of the parent, but he was in turn expected to establish his own right when an adult, by what was referred to as taking hold of the covenant, owning the covenant or renewing the baptismal covenant. This was expected to be an assured development in the child's life, and when it did not materialize something was deemed to have gone wrong. The big obstacle was the requirement for an identifiable conversion experience before the individual was considered eligible for full communion. The individual who could not relate the conversion experience or feared to enter into full communion had to settle for a half-way membership rather than a full membership in the church.

It appears that in most churches all those who sought Half-Way Covenant membership were given some examination as to their qualifications. In the Salem church the rule was that "the parents were to be examined as to their faith by the elders and if satisfactory the children to be baptized."[1]

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[1] Daniel Appleton White, New England Congregationalism in Its Origin and Purity, Illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject (Salem, 1861), p. 92.

The basic requirements were a life free from scandalous conduct and a minimal knowledge of the Christian faith and assent to it; however in some churches fairly stiff doctrinal requirements are to be found. In the Ashford, Connecticut, church it appears that candidates for church membership were examined and depending upon the caliber of their relation of experience were either admitted to full communion or consigned to half-way membership if their experience was not deemed satisfactory.[2] Half-Way Covenant members were required to covenant with the church by owning the church covenant and publicly assenting to it before the church. "This, it is believed, was for a long period the universal practice."[3]

It appears that in most of the churches the same covenant was used for both those covenanting in full communion and those having a limited membership. Some of the churches used the same covenant with only a few lines varied, and this usually involved a deletion of the promise to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the insertion of a clause relative to the training of their children. The Weston, Massachusetts, church had two distinct covenants. The one for Half-Way Covenant membership included the proviso: "You do also particularly promise that you will be prayerful and diligent to obtain further preparations of the sanctuary that may encourage your approaching unto God in all holy ordinances."[4] This seems to have been a fairly common provision and was either stated in the covenant itself or promised by the individual in talks with the pastor or elders.[5]

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[2] "Ashford Congregational Church Records," photostat copy by the Colonial Dames Society, pp. 31-32, 46.

[3] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 279.

[4] Town of Weston . . . Church Records 1709-1825 (Boston, 1901), p. 540.

A sample of one of the briefer Half-Way Covenants is that of the Rowley, Massachusetts, church. It reads:

> I take God, the Father, to be my chiefest good and highest end. I take God, the Son, to be my only Lord and Saviour. I take God, the Holy Spirit, to be my Sanctifier, Teacher, Guide, and Lawgiver. I take the people of God to be my people, in all conditions. I likewise devote and dedicate unto the Lord my whole self, all I am, all I have, and all I can do. And all this I do deliberately, freely, sincerely, and forever.[6]

Later generations of Congregationalists were sometimes puzzled by the thinking of their predecessors which labeled such an expression of faith as a half-way faith. Commenting on the covenant quoted above one of them said: "This 'half-way covenant' seems whole enough to indicate whole-souled Christians, devout and apostolic enough to entitle a man, if he sincerely takes it, to receive the communion on earth, and to stand with boldness at the day of judgment."[7]

A very common practice was for one or both of the parents to own the covenant in order to have a child baptized. This is usually clear in the records from the circumstances and is sometimes bluntly affirmed as in the case of the Chelsea, Massachusetts, church where the records state that on January 14, 1749, "Mr. William Oliver owned the covenant in order to have a child baptized."[8] The Puritan zeal for maintaining the purity of the church was manifested in the alertness which the elders showed in determining whether a child had been conceived legitimately or not. If it could be determined that the parents had been married for a shorter period of time than the normal human gestation period they were declared guilty of fornication and required to make a public confession before their admission to Half-Way Covenant membership. An unwed mother was required to make a similar confession. The church records reveal a great many such cases, but two will suffice for purpose of illustration. In 1694 a couple sought Half-Way Covenant admission to the Dorchester church and "confessing their sin of fornication before marriage did both of them own the covenant and he himself was baptized and three of his children."[9] The records of the Ashford church tell us that in 1736 "was Abigail Abber upon her confession made publicly of her sin of fornication and upon her owning the covenant received under the watch and care of this church and her son Nathan was baptized."[10]

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[5] See example in "Ashford Congregational Church Records," p. 46.

[6] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 369.

[7] Ibid., p. 369.

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[8] Mellen Chamberlain, A Documentary History of Chelsea Including the Boston Precincts of Winnisiment, Rumney Marsh, and Pullen Point 1624-1824, 2 vols. (Boston, 1908), I, 581.

[9] Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England: 1636-1734, ed. Arthur B. Ellis (Boston, 1891), p. 206.

[10] "Ashford Congregational Church Records," p. 28. For discussions of "the seven month's rule" and the variations allowed, see Charles Francis Adams, "Some Phases of Sexual Morality and Church Discipline in Colonial New England," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 2nd

Special events in the life of the individual sometimes called forth an owning of the covenant, and then later the culmination was reached by admission to full communion. The entries in John Fiske's "Notebook" tell of the process with his own son:

> 12 of 7 58. This day Moses Fiske, being suddenly to depart to the college was called forth before the church and owned there his followeth [sic] covenant in the face of the church, personally in covenant engaging himself to the church and the church to him . . . .
>
> 2 of 8 65. My son Moses was propounded to the church to join in full fellowship . . . .
>
> 5 of 9 65. Moses Fiske, after a profession of his faith in the public congregation respecting both the doctrine of the faith; and the work of faith upon his own soul: and the manifestation of his approbation of and consent to the confession of this church: was received unto the covenant of this church and so into full communion.[11]

Special exhortations and periods of revival sometimes resulted in large numbers of young people taking the covenant. When the Half-Way Covenant practice was officially installed in the Dorchester church in 1677 there were thirty-nine young people who owned the covenant as a result of a special "drive" by the pastor. The outstanding example of the effect of a revival meeting on Half-Way Covenant accessions is to be seen in the

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ser., VI, 492-495; Emil Oberholzer, Jr., Delinquent Saints: Disciplinary Action in the Early Congregational Churches of Massachusetts (New York, 1956), pp. 130-135.

[11] John Fiske, "Rev. John Fiske's Notebook," ed. Samuel A. Green, in Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, second series, Vol. XII (1897-1899), 331, 335.

Hartford First Church. According to the church records there were in the year 1696 forty-three admissions to full communion and two hundred and one to Half-Way Covenant membership. Of these latter one hundred and ninety-two of them took the covenant between February 23 and March 22, 1696, during a period of intense revival activity in the church. The second highest number of Half-Way Covenant accession in the Hartford church was in 1730 when there were forty-seven.

Many practical problems of church policy had to be formulated in connection with Half-Way Covenant practices. In 1675 the Norwich, Connecticut, church adopted the rule that "adults who do not endeavor to take hold of the covenant shall be excommunicated."[12] This drastic measure seems, however, to have been more of a threat than a serious intent because this study has failed to find any cases where such a rule was actually carried out although there may very well have been such cases.

The church records are not clear as to what was done about persons who were born to families outside the church and were not themselves able to meet the requirement of experience for full church membership. Such persons had no claim on covenant continuity and had no regeneration experience, but still they might have professed faith and desired to be identified with the church. These persons seem to have been consigned to a limbo-like status by many Congregational churches, and this would appear to represent a large blank in their theological scheme. Some churches did provide for them in their church organization, however. In 1728 the Brewster church voted to admit to baptism the children of "persons not related to the church as children of it, yet publicly and solemnly professing subjection to the terms of the New Covenant with submission to the government of Christ in this church."[13] In 1736 the Boston First Church passed a resolve which seems to have been designed to provide limited church membership for such persons. A number of the churches carry in their records categories of admissions which seem to account for such persons. The clearest example is that of the Norwich, Connecticut, church which from 1700 to 1715 carried only the categories of those in full communion and those who publicly owned the covenant, but from 1718 to 1809 they carried three categories. These were those who were taken into full communion, those who made a Christian profession and were baptized, and those who afterwards sought and were admitted to full communion. The Dorchester church carried much the same three categories from 1677 to 1696. Quite possibly these churches included in the second category those who could not claim covenant connection.

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[12] Church records quoted by George Leon Walker, History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1883 (Hartford, 1884), p. 210.

Half-Way Covenant membership seems to have been transferable from one church to another in the same way as full communion membership. Members who wished to withdraw their membership in order to form a new church had to petition for a release from their covenant obligation for themselves and their children, and the same rule seems to have applied to Half-Way Covenant members.[14] Children of members of fellow churches were baptized according to the principle of communion of churches, and this privilege was usually extended to Half-Way Covenant members[15] although in many cases a church vote was considered necessary before the rite was performed.

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[13] Records of the Brewster Congregational Church 1700-1792 (Boston, n.d.), p. 30.

Negroes appear to have been taken into the Congregational churches in full communion without any hesitancy if they were able to meet the qualification of experience. In a similar fashion they were admitted to Half-Way Covenant membership although the number in this category appears to be rather small or at least only a few cases have been found.[16]

A common practice in the churches was to call upon the membership to renew their covenant when it was thought action was necessary because the church and the country were suffering from a variety of troubles. The purpose of the renewal was usually to get the members more alive to their responsibilities. In some churches only the communicants were called upon to renew their covenants, but in others the Half-Way Covenant members were also called upon to renew their covenant.

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[14] See citations from the Salem church records in White, New England Congregationalism, pp. 73-74, 90-91, 94-95, 99-100, 105-107.

[15] See "Ashford Congregational Church Records," p. 24, for a case in 1734.

[16] For an example of Negro Half-Way Covenant admission see "Ashford Congregational Church Records," pp. 43-44.

The choice of ministers was generally limited to those in full communion, but there were exceptions such as the church at Rowley. Jeremiah Shepard, a son of the famous Thomas Shepard of Cambridge church, came to Rowley as pastor in 1673 with only a Half-Way Covenant membership. After he had preached there a year his colleague, Mr. Philips, the teacher, recommended him to the church for full communion. The church had their doubts and refused to admit him to full communion; however they did continue to listen to him preach for two years after they had decided that he did not have the qualifications for full membership. The church experienced considerable difficulty in securing his dismissal, and it is noteworthy that he is not listed on their records as one of their ministers although he had served them in that capacity for three years.[17]

Sometimes the Half-Way Covenant caused difficulties in calling a pastor. The case of Jonathan Homer reflects this problem. He was called to the New South Church of Boston but declined because this church practiced the Half-Way Covenant. He was then called to the First Church of Newton, but they also practiced the Half-Way Covenant. The custom had been entrenched for a long time, but Homer refused to accept the call to the church unless they revoked their Half-Way Covenant practice. After considerable controversy they revoked their Half-Way Covenant with the result that Homer accepted the call and served as their pastor for many years.[18]

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[17] See the account in Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 368.

In other cases the pastor would accept the call and then after some time in the church would attempt to discontinue the practice. This almost always stirred up controversy and occasionally cost the pastor his job.[19]

There were occasions when the pastor would refuse to make a Half-Way Covenant baptism. In the case of the North Guilford, Connecticut, church there were two occasions when three or four families at a time left the church because the pastor refused to make a Half-Way Covenant baptism. The families in these two incidents went to the Episcopal church where they could have their children baptized.[20]

Assent to Half-Way Covenant practices was sometimes required as a condition for the settlement of a pastor in a charge. An example is the Colchester, Connecticut, church which required this of their new pastor in 1792.[21]

When churches dropped the Half-Way Covenant practices the problem would arise of what to do about those who had been admitted to a limited membership under it. Were they now to be considered as full members?

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[18] Daniel L. Furber, "Historical Discourse," in The Commemorative Services of the First Church in Newton, Massachusetts . . . (Boston, 1890), pp. 40-43.

[19] See examples in Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut, pp. 387, 509, and in E. B. Claggett, "History of the Union Association in New Hampshire," in the Congregational Quarterly, VI (1864), 20.

[20] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut (New Haven, 1861), p. 453.

[21] Ibid., p. 364.

The problem is illustrated in the North Society of Windsor which voted in 1776 as follows:

> All persons in explicit covenant with the church, whether they came in formerly or more latterly, are at liberty if they please to come to all parts of communion with us without renewing the covenant or confession.
>
> However it would be more agreeable if such especially as owned their covenant according to the former usage, were to renew their profession before they came to all parts of communion.[22]

The very cautious tone of this resolve seems to indicate that the church anticipated some objections to the transfer of status.

There were certain limited and perhaps perverse advantages accompanying Half-Way Covenant membership. Such persons were not assessed the levy which was occasionally made on persons in full communion to help pay for the cost of the sacrament. In 1668 the Farmington church voted that each brother of the church in full communion was to contribute one peck of wheat or one shilling to pay for the deficits in this area, and in the future they were to be assessed the same amount per year.[23] In 1732 the Groveland, Massachusetts, church voted that each communicant was to pay one shilling a year toward the cost of the communion, and delinquents were to be suspended from communion unless given an excuse by the pastor and the deacons.[24]

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[22] Henry R. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut . . . (New York, 1859), p. 875.

[23] "Church Records of Farmington, Connecticut," in New England Historical and Genealogical Register, XII (1858), 328.

[24] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 311.

There also appears to have been certain disciplinary advantages in addition to the financial ones. In 1682 one Jonathan Blackman was convicted by the court of horse stealing and lying. As a consequence he was "rejected and disowned from his church relation and excommunicated though not delivered up to Satan as those in full communion."[25] At least the Half-Way Covenant excommunicated person was not faced with as fearsome a prospect as those cast out from full communion.

There were some definite disadvantages to Half-Way Covenant membership that are fairly obvious if viewed in their social setting. Some of the more important ones that can be suggested are being barred from what is generally regarded as the highest sacrament of the Christian religion, bearing the stigma of not meeting the requirements of the Christian religion, being barred from church voting, and in Massachusetts for quite some time being barred from the freemanship and its civil privileges. Other disadvantages can also be cited such as being subjected to exhortation, special training and other pressures designed to make the individual eligible for full membership. A special annoyance must have been the barring from the Lord's Supper. The individuals were required to be present in the service but could not participate, and so they were frequently reminded of their inferior status. What might be classified as an advantage or a disadvantage depending upon the individual's desire for gossip was the provision such as that passed by the Wethersfield church in 1781 providing that confessions of sin were to "be made before the communicants only."[26]

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[25] Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England: 1636-1734, ed. Arthur B. Ellis (Boston, 1891), p. 89.

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[26] "Wethersfield, Connecticut Congregational Church Records: 1648-1861," transcription by the Colonial Dames, p. 7.

CHAPTER XI

EFFECTS

One of the most important problems in connection with a study of the Half-Way Covenant is the effect which it had on the composition of church membership. The Half-Way Covenant system has been widely used as a whipping boy to explain the declension of the Congregational churches from their original piety and religious fervor. The commonest view is to look at the Half-Way Covenant as the cause of the decline because of its effect in changing the actual composition of the church membership. Typical of this approach is the assertion that "the number of church members in full communion was rapidly declining, most people being satisfied with the half-way relationship."[1]

The solution to the problem would seem to lie in a study of the church records for the purpose of determining the ratio of Half-Way Covenant accessions to those in full communion and the trend of the ratio. Unfortunately the state of the church records do not permit anything approximating a thorough study. A great many of the church records have been irrecoverably lost, and many others are inaccessible or illegible. An inductive study of the extant useable records is handicapped by the lack of uniformity in the records themselves. Different recorders within the same church used different schemes of classification, and there are many gaps in the records due, perhaps, to negligence and indifference on the part of the persons responsible for their maintenance. A valid conclusion would, it seems, need to be based upon a comparative study of at least a majority of the churches. Since this seems to be virtually impossible it is necessary to base such a study on a comparatively limited number of churches whose records do permit something of a comparative study for the period in which the Half-Way Covenant was used in the churches.

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[1] William Warren Sweet, Religion in Colonial America (New York, 1949), p. 108.

The figures in the following table were taken directly from the records of the churches involved. The criteria of selection were the availability of the records, a reasonably clear indication as to what the recorders intended to mean by what they recorded and the presence of parallel classifications for a given time period that would allow comparison. The figures cited are at best an approximation because of the many pitfalls in attempting to interpret church records and derive statistics from them. The time spans indicated are those which yielded to a comparative study. Many church records were examined and found deficient for the purposes of this study. For example the library of the Connecticut Historical Society at Hartford has transcriptions, photostatic copies and originals of the records of approximately two hundred and eighty Connecticut Congregational churches, but only seven of them were found to be suitable for the purposes of this study. The most notable absentee from the compilation for the Massachusetts churches is the Boston First Church whose published records are a mine of information, but at the same time the entries for accessions to church membership are not sufficiently clear as to distinctions between full communion and Half-Way Covenant admissions.

TABLE OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP ACCESSIONS

Church	Period	Number admitted to full communion	Number admitted to Half-Way Cov.	Half-Way Covenant per cent of total
Connecticut				
Ashford	1718-1748	182	73	29
Darien	1745-1790	164	154	48
Hartford 1st	1685-1771	476	743	61
Milford	1738-1773	250	64	20
Norwich	1700-1716	77	36	33
	1718-1809	379	541	59
Stonington	1689-1706	137	90	30
	1733-1789	142	119	45
Windsor	1685-1707	129	298	70
	1802-1813	16	32	67
Massachusetts				
Georgetown	1732-1784	176	136	43
Plymouth	1732-1771	211	81	28
Rumney Marsh	1750-1800	89	50	36
	Totals	2429	2417	49.8

The figures for the Half-Way Covenant per cent of the total admissions would need to be revised downward for the true net percentage of members in this classification and those in full communion, because there were those who were first admitted as Half-Way Covenant members and later were able to transfer to full communion status while the Half-Way Covenant principle was still in effect in their church. Of the churches listed above only the Norwich church kept such a classification in its records. For the period 1718-1809, when there were five hundred and forty-one Half-Way Covenant accessions, these records indicate that eighty-six of these later became members in full communion. This represents sixteen per cent of those who joined by way of the Half-Way Covenant. Figures are available on the same item for the Vernon, formerly North Bolton, Connecticut, church which indicate that between 1762 and 1807 there were one hundred and thirty-six Half-Way Covenant admissions to this church, and of these nineteen were later received to full communion. This represents fourteen per cent of the Half-Way Covenant admissions. If these figures are indicative of any trend they would seem to show that there were comparatively few who made the transition from Half-Way Covenant membership to full communion and that the beliefs of the early New England Covenant theologians were far too optimistic concerning their offspring and their relation to their church system.

The table shows something of a trend toward a higher percentage of Half-Way Covenant admissions as time went on. In some churches such as Hartford and Windsor the Half-Way Covenant admissions were an overwhelming majority, but on the other hand Milford shows only one fifth of the total membership coming by way of the Half-Way Covenant. The few figures for Massachusetts show a slightly lower ratio of Half-Way Covenant accessions than in Connecticut, and this would seem to indicate a stiffer adherence to the requirement for full communion in Connecticut;

however what seems more probable is that there was in general a wider acceptance of Half-Way Covenant practices in Connecticut than in Massachusetts.

The limited figures given in the table tend to indicate that in the average church the total membership was almost equally divided between limited and full communion members with the full communion members enjoying a very slim margin of majority. This would probably indicate that in the average Congregational church the members in full communion were an actual majority but possibly were an actual minority of the adults in any given worship service because of the presence of non-members who would tip the scale against their preponderance. This does not seem to be an abnormal ratio and might even compare quite favorably to the ratio in the average Protestant church service today.

The matter of the composition of the congregations and the church membership has led to much speculation as to the effect which the Half-Way Covenant system may have had on the type of preaching and the development and use of means to secure the conversion of the Half-Way Covenant members. Evaluations of these subjects are at best highly subjective because of the lack of evidence to evaluate the average sermon and the practice of the average minister. The use of means became the subject of a considerable controversy in the period following Jonathan Edwards, but it seems dubious if the Half-Way Covenant practices can be considered responsible for any inordinate stress on means. John Davenport was the arch-foe of the Half-Way Covenant, and yet he certainly seems to have stressed the use of all available means to secure the conversion of his constituency. The point is that almost any and every group will try to use means to augment its numbers, and this seems to depend more upon the aggressiveness of the leadership than upon a given system.

The matter of the effect of Half-Way Covenant membership upon the type of preaching is likewise an extremely difficult question to assess because of the difficulty of establishing a norm by which to evaluate it. Many writers tend to suggest that as Half-Way Covenant members supposedly became more and more numerous in the congregations, the pastors tended to accommodate their messages to a lower level of spiritual development and knowledge, and that ethical preaching was stressed instead of doctrinal. This may very well be true as a general trend, but to attempt to establish any kind of a cause and effect relationship between this trend and the Half-Way Covenant usage seems to be hazardous at best.

The extent to which Half-Way Covenant members were able to influence church matters in formal procedures can be indicated with more accuracy, perhaps, than their influence in the more intangible areas. All of the known facts seem to indicate that Half-Way Covenant members were not allowed to vote in church affairs. This is not to say that they did not agitate to secure such a vote. The Magnalia clearly indicates that Half-Way Covenant members did try to secure "equal terms in all votes"[2] with those who were in full communion, and the Massachusetts records confirm this statement. At the October 14, 1668 session of the Massachusetts General Court the Court emphatically asserted that only those in full communion were to have any vote in the election of church officers. They stated that under sectionfour of their ecclesiastical laws each church had full power to elect its own officers, and they then asserted that by the church they meant those in full communion. Lest there be any difficulty on this score the Court authorized sanctions by providing that "no inhabitant in any town shall challenge a right unto, or act in the calling or election of such officer or minister, until he be in full communion, upon the penalty of being accounted a disturber of peace."[3] This rule was changed as a result of the Parish controversy of 1692-1695 which resulted in an arrangement whereby the church still called the minister but the town had to approve him and thus had a large voice in his choice.[4] The basis of this development was the fact that the town was taxed for the minister's support so should have a voice in his selection. In Connecticut the town had a voice in the ministers selection at a much earlier date. For example the town in 1667 determined that Israel Chauncy was to remain as minister at Stratford.[5]

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[2] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698 in Seven Books, 2 vols (Hartford, 1853-1855), II, 656.

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[3] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, ed. Nathaniel Shurtleff, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), IV, Pt. 2, 396.

[4] See discussion in Albert Edward McKinley, The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America (Philadelphia, 1905), pp. 363-365.

[5] Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull, 15 vols. (Hartford, 1850-1890), II, 74.

The evidence seems to indicate that it can hardly be said that the Half-Way Covenant members as such were able to control church affairs directly, but they had the potential of indirect control if they should choose to align themselves as a voting block with the legal voters of the town, precinct or society who did have potential control over the church affairs after they had been allowed this right.

A word of caution may be in order here concerning the general role of Half-Way Covenant members in town and church affairs. There is evident in many writers a tendency to identify the Half-Way Covenant members as a sort of unspiritual, disgruntled block who were hostile to the church and constantly opposing it. Actually many, perhaps a majority sometimes, of the Half-Way Covenant members were either high type Christians whose only ecclesiastical defect was the lack of an outstanding religious experience which was supposed to give them the earmarks of the regenerate or they were persons of such deep religious introspection that they doubted their own worthiness. Such individuals may have been as vitally dedicated to the welfare of their church as any of their brethren who met the emotional qualification. When the experience requirement was dropped by the churches it can hardly be said that they were suddenly overwhelmed by the supposed latent force of opposition.

The relationship between the Half-Way Covenant and the Franchise has always been a source of difficulty to students of the ecclesiastical and political history of New England and particularly of Massachusetts. By a law of 1631 Massachusetts limited the freemanship, which included the right to vote, to members of the church. From 1639 until its absorption into Connecticut in 1662 the New Haven colony had the same restrictions. Connecticut and Plymouth had no such explicitly stated limitation but did exercise a certain amount of restriction on admission of inhabitants which may have had something of the same effect, because "while there was no religious qualification for the freemanship, the character of a man's religious belief might procure his admission or exclusion from the colony."[6] It has been suggested that "it is almost the universal opinion of Connecticut historians that the actual administration of the freemanship principle in that colony led at first to virtually the same restrictions upon the suffrage as existed in New Haven or Massachusetts."[7]

There does not seem to be any evidence to show the presence of the franchise issue in the agitation for establishing the Half-Way Covenant principles, but once they were established there is evidence of considerable agitation to extend the freemanship privileges to Half-Way Covenant members; however Plymouth appears to have been singularly free from this agitation. The royal commissioners reported concerning Plymouth in 1664 that "they are here constrained to persuade men, sometimes to compell them to be free, so far are they from hindering any."[8] The Connecticut records[9] show the presence of considerable agitation in 1657 and 1664 regarding the privileges of freemen and the franchise, but the details of the affairs are not given.

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[6] McKinley, Suffrage Franchise, p. 344.

[7] Ibid., p. 389. This view has been rejected by David H. Fowler, "Connecticut's Freemen: The First Forty Years," The William and Mary Quarterly, XV (July, 1958), 330-331.

[8] [Thomas Hutchinson], A Collection of Original Papers Relative to the History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1769), p. 416.

In Massachusetts the franchise was openly limited to church members, and, as might be expected, there was a continuing effort made to extend the privileges of voting to Half-Way Covenant members. In May of 1658 some non-freemen of Ipswich petitioned the court for clarification of an earlier law which had extended some civil privileges to them. This apparently was a reference to the action of the court on May 26, 1647, which had extended considerable privileges to the non-freemen in civil matters. The court responded to the Ipswich petition by voting that "all Englishmen that are settled inhabitants and house holders in any town of the age of 24 years and of honest and good conversation, being rated at 24 pounds . . . that hath taken the oath of fidelity to this government . . . may be chosen jurymen or constables, and have their vote in the choice of selectmen."[10] The provision in the earlier law which required that the majority of the members of these bodies must be freemen was retained, and all other laws concerning non-freemen were repealed. This seems to have been a concession, though limited, to the non-freemen and reflects pressure from that source.

In May of 1660 the General Court emphatically affirmed that none were to be regarded as freemen except those who were members in "full communion"[11] of some church, and they indicated that they regarded this as the intent of the law of 1631. This action seems to indicate definite agitation on the part of the Half-Way Covenant members for the purpose of securing recognition as church members for the purpose of the freemanship qualification. The Court records indicate that they had taken this action in response to proposals from certain inhabitants of Middlesex county.

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[9] Records of the Colony of Connecticut, I, 293, 417-418.

[10] Records of Massachusetts Bay, IV, Pt. 1, 336.

The formulation of the Half-Way Covenant ideas in 1657 had been followed by agitation for inclusion of Half-Way Covenant members under the qualifications for the franchise, and the formal ratification of the principles by the Synod of 1662 produced the same result.

The cause of the Half-Way covenant members as well as other non-freemen was considerably aided by the king's directive of 1662 which requested removal of all ecclesiastical qualifications for the freemanship.[12] In May of 1663 the deputies of Salem were "instructed by their constituents to vote in General Court for enlargement of political franchise, as the late royal letter required."[13] The Massachusetts Court, however, was able to circumvent the king's desires for a considerable period of time.

On August 3, 1664, the Massachusetts Court acted to comply with the request contained in the king's letter of June 28, 1664, that the church membership requirement for all freemen be repealed. The Court obliged by repealing the law and adopting new regulations which met the legal requirements of the king's directive, but at the same time kept, in practice, the admission to the freemanship largely in the hands of the clergy and the churches. Candidates for the freemanship under the new regulations were first of all required to present a certificate from the minister or ministers of the place in which they lived that they were "orthodox in religion, and not vicious in their lives."[14] In addition to this they were required to present a certificate from the selectmen of their community stating that they were either rateable to ten shillings of property or were members in full communion of some church among them. The previous requirements of twenty-four years of age and a settled householder were retained. They were also required to present themselves to the General Court which could admit them by a majority vote if it considered them qualified.

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[11] Ibid., IV, Pt. 1, 420.

[12] Ibid., IV, Pt. 2, 164.

[13] Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England; Comprising not Only Religious, but also Moral, and Other Relations, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855-1862), II, 303. Felt cites the "MS Town Records" for this statement.

It seems quite evident that anyone the least distasteful to the clergy or the Court would have a difficult time securing the freemanship. The royal commissioners were not fooled by the intent of this act and reported that they "examined many townships, and found that scarce three in a hundred pay ten shillings at a single rate; yet if this rate was general it would be just; but he that is a church member, though he be a servant and pay not two pence, may be a freeman."[15]

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[14] Records of Massachusetts Bay, IV, Pt. 2, 118.

[15] [Hutchinson], Collections p. 418.

In his diary John Hull records that on the first day of Court, May 3, 1665, "there was about seventy freemen admitted sundry whereof were not members of any particular church, which had been the general rule of admission hitherto."[16] Hull's statement stands in conflict with the records of the Court which show only five admitted to the status of freemen on that occasion. One of these was admitted on his certificate that he was a member of the Dorchester church, and the other four were admitted on the basis of certificates that they were members in full communion of the Rowley church.[17] Whether Hull was misinformed, the records failed to show all that transpired, or there were that many applicants and only five were admitted is hard to determine. The records would tend to show a continuation of the established practice as to admission to the freemanship.

In October of 1673 the Massachusetts Court passed another law pertaining to the admission of freemen which seems designed to delay the process of admission to the freemanship. This law provided that all men seeking admission to the freemanship who were not members in full communion of a church were to submit their requests to the secretary of the court at the Court of Election. These names were to be read to the court sometime during its session, but the names were not to be voted upon until the next Court of Election. This would mean a full year's delay on their request.[18]

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[16] John Hull, "Diary of John Hull," in Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society, III, 217.

[17] Records of Massachusetts Bay, IV, Pt. 2, 145-146.

[18] Ibid., IV, Pt. 2, 562.

A letter in the name of Charles II. dated July 24, 1679, again requested Massachusetts to change their requirements for the freemanship. It pointedly says "nor do we think it fit that any other distinction be observed in the making of freemen, than that they be men of competent estates rateable at ten shillings."[19] Thomas Hutchinson has this discerning note concerning the letter and its reception: "They seem to have held out till the last in refusing to admit any to be freemen who were not, either church members or who did not, at least obtain a certificate from the minister of the town that they were orthodox, of good lives etc."[20] The crown took over the active control of Massachusetts affairs in 1691 and was able to impose its will but only after a long period of coping with exasperating evasive tactics on the part of the Massachusetts Court, which seems to have been determined to retain the freemanship within the limits of those in full communion.

The evidence seems to indicate that the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant stirred up agitation for extension of the freemanship to include those who at least held a limited church membership. Their efforts were augmented by the royal desires to extend the franchise, but there were also countering influences within the Half-Way Covenant system. The Half-Way Covenant made it easier to obtain baptism for infants, but this very relaxation of the requirements for this ordinance was intended by the framers of the

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[19] [Hutchinson], _Collections_, p. 520.

[20] _Ibid._, p. 520.

Half-Way Covenant to be a means of retaining the rigid requirements for full communion. In his "Propositions,"[21] of January, 1664/5, Jonathan Mitchell, who had been one of the foremost advocates of the Half-Way Covenant in the Synod of 1662, emphatically asserted that it would be a great calamity if the New England churches were to lower the requirements for admission to full communion, and he quite probably indicated the sentiment of most of the ministers of the Half-Way Covenant party. It would seem that the Half-Way Covenant was far from being intended as a concession to grant the franchise extension, and it actually may have had the effect of limiting its extension by strengthening the hand of those who sought to maintain the rigid requirements for admission to full communion and hence the freemanship. Although there does not seem to be any positive evidence to verify the suggestion, the franchise limitation may have helped to promote efforts designed to secure the removal of the institution of relations as a requirement for full communion. This removal would have made it easier to gain admission to full communion and then the franchise.

One of the important, though again intangible, effects of the Half-Way Covenant upon the Congregational churches may have been to deprive them of a considerable pool of strong leadership. None of their continuing posterity could vote or hold office in the churches unless they passed through the required emotional experience. It is hardly fair to blame the Half-Way

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[21] The text is given in Mather, Magnalia, II, 102-104, see also II, 69 for more on Mitchell's views.

Covenant for this state of affairs because the blame clearly lies on the institution of relations which led to the formulation of the Half-Way Covenant system, but in practice the Half-Way Covenant membership became the repository of many persons who normally could have assumed positions of leadership in the churches. The lack of leadership in the churches was clearly recognized and deeply lamented by the Reforming Synod of 1679.[22]

Another development within some of the Congregational churches which many have considered as an effect of the Half-Way Covenant and one which is alleged to have lessened the purity of the churches was Stoddardeanism with its principle of urging many to come to the Lord's Table who were barred by the Half-Way Covenant system from participation.

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[22] Question 2, Answer 5 of the results, in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), p. 434.

CHAPTER XII

STODDARD AND EDWARDS

The heat generated by the controversies in the Hartford and Boston churches had hardly had time to cool off before most of New England's intellectual and physical energy was diverted to the problem of the Indian uprising known as King Philip's War which raged in the years 1675-1676. The ravages of this war were followed by a whole series of disaster such as major fires in Boston in 1676 and 1679, increased shipwrecks, smallpox epidemics and a gathering threat of more royal control over colonial affairs. At the same time there was evident a decided declension in religious loyalties and an increasing tempo of secularization of society. In this context a group of eighteen ministers, under the leadership of Increase Mather, petitioned the Massachusetts Court for a synod, and the Court responded by calling for a synod to meet at Boston on the second Wednesday of September, 1679, for the purpose of a "revisal of the platform of discipline agreed upon by the churches, 1647,"[1] and whatever else was deemed necessary for the welfare of the churches. The churches were directed to bear the cost of the synod. The Court's records indicate two questions to be considered although it has been suggested that these were appended after the vote of the

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[1] Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, ed. Nathaniel Shurtleff, 5 vols. (Boston, 1853-1854), V, 215.

Court.[2] The questions were: "Question 1. What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to bring his judgments on New England? Quest. 2. What is to be done that so those evils may be reformed?"[3] As a consequence of this commission, the Synod of 1679-1680 is usually known as the Reforming Synod.

The affairs of the synod which are particularly pertinent to the Half-Way Covenant problem center on the activities of Solomon Stoddard, the minister of the Northampton church, who led the faction seeking to liberalize the policy of admission to church membership, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The first session of the synod met at Boston on September 10, 1679. Details concerning the activities of the session are given to us by Peter Thacker who was a delegate from the Old South Church, Boston. He tells us that on September 19 there "was much debate about persons being admitted to full communion."[4] The chief disputants were Stoddard and Increase Mather. Apparently this was a continuation of a standing difference of opinion on the matter. In a sermon preached in 1677 Mather had indicated the presence of an opposing viewpoint when he said "I wish there be not teachers found in our Israel, that have espoused loose principles here, designing to bring all persons to the Lord's Supper, who have an historical faith, and are not scandalous in life, though they never had experience of a work of regeneration in their souls."[5] Mather does not indicate who he has in mind, but the subsequently revealed position of Stoddard would certainly have identified him with this party.

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[2] See discussion in Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), p. 416, n. 2.

[3] Records of Massachusetts Bay, V, 216.

[4] Peter Thacker, "Journal," in Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 419.

Stoddard's influence was sufficiently strong to secure a modification of the requirements for admission to the Lord's Supper. Chapter twelve of the Cambridge Platform had controlled the participation in the Lord's Supper by means of the requirements for church membership which included the relation of experience. The Synod of 1679 adopted a new suggestion for admission to the Lord's Supper which deleted the requirement of relations. Question two, answer three, of the propositions of the Synod of 1679 states:

> It is requisite that persons be not admitted unto Communion in the Lord's Supper without making a personal and public profession of their faith and repentance, either orally, or in some other way, so as shall be to the just satisfaction of the church . . . .[6]

Stoddard gave the following account of the adoption of this principle by the synod:

> Some of the Elders in the synod had drawn up a conclusion, that persons should make a relation of the work of God's spirit upon their hearts, in order to coming into full communion. Some others of the elders objected against it, and after some discourse it was agreed to have a dispute on the question, whether those professors of religion as are of good conversation, are not to be admitted to full

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[5] Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 280, n. 1.

[6] Ibid., p. 433.

> communion, provided they are able to examine themselves, and discern the Lord's body. Mr. [Increase] Mather, held the negative; I labored to make good the affirmative; The result was, that they blotted out that clause of making a relation of the work of God's Spirit, and put in the room of it, *The Making a profession of their faith and repentance;* and so I voted with the rest, and am of the same judgment still.[7]

The validity of Stoddard's claim was denied by the anonymous writer of *An Appeal of Some of the Unlearned,*[8] but the anonymous nature of the contradiction seriously undermines its worth. In any case the result of the synod's action was a victory for Stoddard because it left the way open for his subsequent ideas without exposing him to the charge of heresy.

The synod also voted an unanimous approval of the Cambridge Platform, but as it had no doctrinal statement a committee was appointed to draw up a suitable one to be presented to the second session.

This second session met at Boston on May 12, 1680. Their committee which had been appointed to draw up a doctrinal statement recommended that they adopt the Confession of Faith contained in the Savoy Declaration of 1658. This was a Confession of the English Congregationalists and followed the Westminster Confession with only a few variations. The Synod of 1680 adopted the Savoy Confession with only a few slight alterations,[9] and then adjourned.

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[7] Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned* (Boston, 1709), pp. 93-94. The italics are Stoddard's.

[8] (Boston, 1709), p. 17.

[9] See Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms,* pp. 420-422, 425, 367-402, for discussion and text of the Savoy Confession.

The period following the synod appears to have been one of comparative calm as far as the Half-Way Covenant issues are concerned. There is evident both before and following the synod a trend towards relaxation of the requirement for the giving of a public relation of experience before admission to full communion. In 1678 the Old South Church of Boston voted to modify their policy in order to allow those who did not wish to make a public relation to give it to the elders instead. The elders in turn were to certify this to the church.[10] In 1679 the Boston First Church voted to allow men to make a written relation of experience if the elders thought it advisable.[11] In 1696 Samuel Sewall noted that "a church is gathered at Cambridge North-farms. No relations made but a covenant signed and voted by 10 brethren."[12]

The first major revision in church policies after those of the Woodbury church in 1670 appears to have been that of the Brattle Square Church of Boston. Organized in 1698, this church called Benjamin Colman to be its pastor in 1699 and issued a Manifesto setting forth the principles of worship and church policy to be used in the new church. These included the provisions that baptism would be administered to the child of any person making a genuine profession of Christian faith, the practice of a relation of experience was abolished, and permission was granted to the members of the congregation whether communicants or non-communicants to vote in parish affairs and in the election of a minister.[13]

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[10] Hamilton A. Hill, A History of the Old South Church, 2 vols, (Boston, 1890), I, 229.

[11] The Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868, ed., Richard D. Pierce, 3 vols. in Collections of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, vols. 39-41 (Boston, 1961), I, 75, 119.

[12] Samuel Sewall, "Diary of Samuel Sewall," in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Fifth series, Vol. V (1878), 435.

This appears to have been the first major move of the developing liberal wing of Congregationalism. Increase Mather, one of the leaders of the traditional adherents, sought to counter these innovations with his Order of the Gospel (Boston, 1700). It is a general defense of the established Congregational policies.

Solomon Stoddard precipitated the next major controversy relative to the Half-Way Covenant with the publication at London in 1700 of his Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God. In this book Stoddard launched a frontal attack on a number of cherished Congregational tenets. This publication was followed by a considerable exchange of controversial writing,[14] most of it between Stoddard and his antagonist of many years, Increase Mather. The basic lines of Stoddard's attack on the traditional Congregational system are all laid out in his Doctrine of the Instituted Churches which is strongly Presbyterian in its orientation. He upheld the concept of national churches,[15] proposed to limit the power of the congregation in church affairs,[16] and rejected the validity of the church covenant principle by declaring that "this doctrine of the particular covenant which is wholly unscriptural, is the reason that many among us are shut out of the church, to whom the church privileges do belong."[17] He rejected the validity of the institution of relations[18] as he had done in 1679, and affirmed that only the minister was to determine who were the proper subjects of baptism.[19] He declared that a person did not need to be a member of any particular congregation in order to be baptized, that the children of covenant persons were to be baptized and the children of excommunicants and of servants of the people of God were to be baptized.[20]

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[13] The text of the Manifesto is given in the Records of the Church in Brattle Square Boston with Lists of Communicants 1699-1872, Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals (Boston, 1902), pp. vii-viii. For examples of earlier exceptions to the generally accepted practice of non-communicants not voting in church affairs see Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 473.

[14] See Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 240-241 for a listing of the major writings in this controversy.

Revolutionary as these proposals were, they were not the main line of Stoddard's attack but rather were incidental to his foremost objective which was to revise radically the Congregational doctrine concerning the eligibility for the Lord's Supper. It is this for which Stoddard is probably best known, and for which he has been censured most widely by many writers.

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[15] Stoddard, Doctrine of Instituted Churches, pp. 25-29.

[16] Ibid., p. 12.

[17] Ibid., p. 8.

[18] Ibid., p. 21.

[19] Ibid., p. 12.

[20] Ibid., p. 18.

Interpretation of Stoddard is difficult because he is not always clear as to what he intends to include in some of his designations. The basic question concerning Stoddard's motives is that of determining how far he intended to extend participation in the Lord's Supper. He clearly intended to allow much more latitude than had hitherto been practiced in most Congregational churches, but did he intend to include everyone promiscuously? His enemies uniformly accused him of this intent, but he emphatically insisted that he did not intend to include all.[21]

Stoddard started to build his case by defining visible saints. He denied the validity of determining these by "the strictest examination"[22] and offered his own definition which served as a test: "visible saints are such as make a serious profession of the true religion, together with those that do descend from them, till rejected of God."[23] This definition ruled out the necessity of an experience and put in its place a serious profession which would seem to be basically an intellectual rather than an emotional tenet. Stoddard clearly and firmly maintained the covenant theory of continuity in his definition. He then laid down three qualifications for admission to the Lord's Supper by saying that candidates must possess "visible saintship" as previously defined, they must "be not scandalous" and "have knowledge to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body."[24]

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[21] Stoddard, Appeal to the Learned, p. 2.

[22] Stoddard, Doctrine of Instituted Churches, p. 6.

[23] Ibid., p. 6.

[24] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

This last provision ruled out infants of course, but otherwise his reasoning proceeded as follows:

> All adult persons that are fit to be admitted into the church, ordinarily have all those qualifications requisite to the participation of the Lord's Supper. They make profession of the true faith, and are of good conversation, they have knowledge of the principles of religion, and so are able to examine themselves, and if any of them should not understand the nature of that ordinance, they may soon be sufficiently informed.[25]

Stoddard continued his argument by asserting that there is no valid reason why persons qualified to be admitted to the church and continued in the church should be denied access to the Lord's Supper. He raised this challenging question: "If they are guilty of any such offense as to be denied the Lord's Supper, why are they not censured? If they are not worthy to be censured, why are they kept from the Lord's Supper?"[26]

Stoddard then proceeded to the most controversial and probably the most misunderstood section of his argument. The interpretive problem is one of determining what Stoddard intended to mean by the terms which he used, and the terms which he used are loaded with theological explosives. Stoddard posed the problem by means of the following question and answer:

> Quest: Here it may be enquired, whether such persons as have a good conversation and a competent knowledge, may come to the Lord's Supper with a good conscience, in case they know themselves to be in a natural condition?
>
> Answ. They may and ought to come, tho they know themselves to be in a natural condition; this ordinance is

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[25] Ibid., p. 19.

[26] Ibid., p. 20.

> instituted for all the adult members of the church who are not scandalous, and therefore must be attended by them, as no man may neglect prayer, or hearing the word, because he cannot do it in faith, so he may not neglect the Lord's Supper.[27]

As commonly interpreted this statement is taken to mean that Stoddard advocated a general admission to the Lord's Supper of all respectable persons even though an individual knew himself to be in the natural unregenerate state which is recognized as the antithesis of the Christian's state. This statement by Stoddard has to be taken in the light of his own explanation of what was intended:

> The Lord's Supper is instituted to be a means of Regeneration, it is not appointed for the converting of men to the Christian religion, for only such as are converted may partake of it; but it is not only for the strengthening of saints, but a means also to work saving regeneration.[28]

The above statement appears to be absolutely self-contradictory unless it is interpreted in the light of Stoddard's Covenant theology with its theory of unbroken continuity apart from excommunication. Stoddard was simply pushing the theory of continuity to its logical limits and applying it consistently in practice. His statement clearly indicated that he thought the supper was "not appointed for the converting of men to the Christian religion," but he also said that the supper was "a means of regeneration." What he meant was that all who made a serious profession of faith were in the covenant of grace and their children likewise. Apparently this would include all Half-Way Covenant members whose parents had acted with sincerity. Stoddard's intent was that those who were descendents of persons who had made a serious profession of faith were in the church by reason of the continuity of the covenant promise. They might still have been in an unregenerate natural state, but nevertheless they were in the church by virtue of the promised continuity. He declared that "it is unreasonable to believe men to be visible saints from their infancy till they be forty years of age, and yet not capable of coming to the Lord's Supper, for want of exercise of faith."[29] If during this time they were still in their natural unregenerate state, it was the duty of the church to foster their regeneration, and the Lord's Supper, according to Stoddard, was one of the means designed to accomplish this. Stoddard's statement on this point was:

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[27] Ibid., p. 21.

[28] Ibid, p. 22.

> The end of all ordinances is salvation . . . . This ordinance hath a proper tendency to draw sinners to Christ . . . . All other ordinances are appointed for regeneration, prayer, hearing the word, baptism; so likewise the censures are that the soul may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; they are to further men's regeneration, in case they be not converted already, and it would be strange if the Lord's Supper should not be appointed for that end.[30]

Part of the difficulty in interpreting Stoddard's thought lies in his rather loose use of terms that are heavily weighted with theological connotations. An example of this type of usage is seen in the preceding quotation where his argument is that the supper is a means of regenerating men "in case they be not converted already," but on the same page he has argued also that the Lord's Supper was "not appointed for the converting of men to the Christian religion." As has already been suggested Stoddard had in view two different categories of the unconverted and the unregenerate, but unless these are kept in mind closely it is very easy to misinterpret his meaning. This appears to have been what was done by his contemporary controversialists, and many writers have since done the same thing.

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[29] _Ibid._, p. 20.

[30] _Ibid._, p. 22.

The same view of the role of the Lord's Supper that Stoddard advocated is seen in the teachings of the Scotch Presbyterian, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), who declared that "it is not the profession of the possession of grace, but only the waiting upon the ordinances of grace that makes one a member of the church."[31] Germs of Stoddard's ideas can also be seen in the writings of Dudley Fenner who was writing on the two degrees of the regenerate state, but also related the function of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper much more closely than many writers. His statement is:

> There be two degrees, as it were two ages, infancy and man's estate. Infancy is a weak inception all our life . . . . This age, for the tenderness of it, hath the help of two sacraments to confirm it by baptism and the Lord's Supper.
>
> Baptism is a washing with water to assure our incorporation into Christ, figured in circumcision before his coming. The supper is a receiving of bread and wine to assure our growing up in Christ.[32]

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[31] As quoted in John MacPherson, The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology (Edinburgh, 1903), p. 78.

[32] Dudley Fenner, The Sacred Doctrine of Divinity Gathered Out of the Word of God (1599), pp. 50-51.

There are two principles that seem to stand out in the theology of Stoddard. One is a firm and consistent adherence to the principles of Covenant theology. The other is a decidedly soteriological orientation which seems to be a considerable modification of earlier Congregationalism. John Calvin, the Puritans in general and the Congregationalists up to this point seem to have all laid their primary emphasis on the matter of glorifying God, but with Stoddard there was a shift in emphasis away from the doxological concept to one in which the pre-eminence was placed on the salvation of men. This salvation was made the controlling principle of Stoddard's system. In a sermon preached in 1700 he indicated his philosophy by quoting 1 Tim. 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" and declaring that he considered this the distinguishing doctrine of Christianity. He affirmed that "whoever therefore rejects this article, he does indeed reject the Christian religion."[33] Stoddard appears to have been quite successful in applying his new theological emphasis because his ministry was featured by at least five major revivals in his Northampton church.

Stoddard appears to have put in practice his lowered requirements for admission to the Lord's Supper sometime during the period 1704-1706. It has been stated that "he formed a short profession for persons to make, in order to be admitted into the church answerable to this principle; and accordingly persons were admitted into the church, and to the sacrament, on these terms."[34] The church records apparently show that "as late as 1706 a distinction was made between covenant members and those in full communion."[35]

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[33] Solomon Stoddard, Sermons Preached in 1700, p. 55.

The extent of the acceptance of Stoddard's views on the role of the Lord's Supper is uncertain. One study concludes that "through the great influence of Stoddard, his views gained considerable currency in the Connecticut Valley, but not, as I can learn, elsewhere. No trace of them is to be found in the records of any of the churches in this vicinity."[36] Another study comes to a somewhat different conclusion and claims that "these views of Stoddard spread widely and were adopted by many good men. The majority of the churches in Western Massachusetts accepted them, they were largely entertained in Connecticut, and the region about Boston was not without their representatives."[37] The issue is clouded by the frequency with which the Half-Way Covenant system and Stoddardeanism are equated. The many references to the Half-Way Covenant which really mean Stoddard's teaching would indicate that Stoddard had a fairly wide following.

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[34] Sereno Edwards Dwight , ed. , The Works of President Edwards with a Memoir of His Life, 10 vols. (New York, 1830), I, 301.

[35] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 281, n. 5. Joseph Bellamy claimed that Stoddard never practiced the Half-Way Covenant. See his The Half-Way Covenant: A Dialogue in The Works of Joseph Bellamy . . . , 2 vols. (Boston, 1853), II, 671.

[36] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 275.

[37] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 282. As of 1750 Walker lists twenty-two pro-Stoddardean churches in the Old Hampshire Association [Western Massachusetts] and only three anti-Stoddardean.

Stoddardeanism appears to have exerted considerable influence on the Half-Way Covenant system. It actually made the Half-Way Covenant unnecessary by lowering the bars to church membership and communion privileges. In this respect it might be regarded as more of a competitive system than an antagonistic one. Stoddard's attack on many cherished facets of the traditional Congregational system aroused the hostility of those committed to the traditional system, and they vigorously attacked him for his departure from the ideal of the pure church and his advocacy of allowing unsanctified persons access to the communion.

The main opposition to the Half-Way Covenant came from a comparatively new force in New England theology which tended to equate Stoddardeanism with the Half-Way Covenant principles and opposed both ideas. The new force was the revivalistic spirit which challenged the theory of continuity in both Stoddardeanism and the Half-Way Covenant system. The revivalistic spirit renewed the stress on experience which Stoddardeanism minimized and the Half-Way Covenant advocates considered essential but were having increasing difficulty in promoting. The new force was able to initiate sufficient momentum nearly to destroy the old systems but was not able to maintain its own momentum. The result was that Congregationalism lost its stress on experience but saved its theory of continuity. This made the Half-Way Covenant no longer necessary, and it gradually died out.

Revivalism has been defined as "a type of religious worship and practice centering in evangelical revivals, or outbursts of mass religious fervour, and stimulated by intensive preaching and prayer meetings."[38] It had one of its greatest manifestations in New England in the Great Awakening of about 1740-1743 under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and others. The chief long-range effect of Revivalism was to undercut the theory of covenant continuity[39] which was so important to both Stoddardeanism and the Half-Way Covenant system, and in its place the necessity of religious experience was exhalted. This was not, it seems, a necessary concomitant of Revivalism, but this was the course it took in the main. It is one of the paradoxes of the movement that in some churches it had the effect of destroying the Half-Way Covenant while in others it led to its temporary installation. That Stoddardeanism was not incompatible with Revivalism is seen in the Northampton church where there were revivals in 1672, 1682, 1695, 1711, 1717 under Stoddard and the great revival of 1735 under Jonathan Edwards.

The effect which Revivalism temporarily had on the theory of continuity in the Presbyterian church illustrates its workings. The movement apparently began with the preaching of Gilbert Tennent. It has been affirmed that "by 1729, Tennent's scattered congregations between New Brunswick and

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[38] F. L. Cross, ed., The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (London, 1958), p. 1162.

[39] See discussion in Peter Ymen De Jong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1945), pp. 103, 136, 179, 206. See also Lewis Bevens Schenck, The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant (New Haven, 1940), pp. 1-3, and his third chapter which is entitled "The Threat of Revivalism to the Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant."

Staten Island began to thrill with new life. The Great Awakening had begun in the Presbyterian churches."[40] Religious experience was the theme of Tennent and his followers. It has been affirmed that "the anguish of coming to the conviction that one was not a Christian, and the subsequent joy of coming to know that one had become a Christian indeed, were the two foci about which the preaching of all the Tennent group swung."[41] Tennent signed the Preface to his Solemn Warning on June 10, 1734, and the work was published in 1735. The theme of the entire work is a plea for an identifiable religious experience. The idea of any efficacy in a historical and non-emotional faith or religious life is emphatically denied as is any idea of the efficacy of covenant continuity. The work is filled with lurid passages such as this: "Awake ye prophane swearers, and remember ye will not get a drop of water to cool your cursing cursed tongues in Hell, when they and you shall flame in the broad burning lake."[42] Jonathan Edwards' Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God seems mild in comparison to this, but both of them reflect the intense emotional nature of the preaching of this period.

The extent to which the Revivalists demanded an objective religious experience and the extent to which this in turn would have affected the Presbyterian membership is clearly indicated in words of Jedediah Andrews, minister of the First Presbyterian in Philadelphia, who wrote to a friend in 1741:

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[40] Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 58.

[41] Ibid., p. 58.

[42] Gilbert Tennent, Solemn Warning to the Secure World, from the God of Terrible Majesty (Boston, 1735), p. ix.

> A prevailing rule to try converts is that if you don't know when you were without Christ and unconverted, etc. you have no interest in Christ, let your love and your practice be what they may; which rule, as it is unscriptural, so I am of the mind will cut off nine in ten, if not ninety-nine in a hundred of the good people in the world that have had a pious education.[43]

One of the anomalies of Revivalism is that in some Presbyterian churches it seems to have actually led to the temporary installation of the Half-Way Covenant.[44] In these churches it served the same function that it did in the Congregational churches, and this was to serve as a repository for those who had not undergone the religious experience considered vital to salvation. The Half-Way Covenant had a short life in these churches because the theory of continuity soon regained its ascendancy over the revivalistic spirit.

In the Congregational churches Revivalism seems to have largely militated against the Half-Way Covenant system and also against Stoddardeanism. The revivals and the itinerant preachers who were associated with them produced many bitter debates, controversies and church splits. One study has suggested that "the 'Half-Way Covenant' furnished the occasion"[45] for much of the argument between the "Old Lights" and the "New Lights" which arose out of the revival activity. These terms were used to designate the differing attitudes towards Revivalism, but the latter term was also used to designate theological liberals. The result was a rather muddled use of the terms in many cases, but the opponents of the Half-Way Covenant were included in the "New Light" movement while the supporters of the Half-Way Covenant system were definitely in the "Old Light" school as defenders of the standing order.

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[43] Full text of the letter is given in Richard Webster, A History of the Presbyterian Church in America from Its Origin Until the Year 1760 (Philadelphia, 1857), pp. 178-181.

[44] Schenck, Presbyterian Doctrine of Children, pp. 55-56, 80.

One of the clearest examples of the effects of Revivalism on the Half-Way Covenant is seen in the splits which both factors brought about in some of the Congregational churches. These resulted in the formation of what are known as the Strict or Separate Congregational churches. Most of the Strict Congregational churches arose in southeastern Connecticut,[46] but there were also Strict Congregational churches in Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Vermont. Opposition to the Half-Way Covenant was one of the main causes of these splits.[47]

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[45] Gaius Glenn Atkins and Frederick L. Fagley, History of American Congregationalism (Boston, 1942), pp. 113-114.

[46] For discussions of these churches see S. Leroy Blake, The Separates or Strict Congregationalists of New England (Boston, 1902), and Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut (New Haven, 1861), pp. 253-259.

[47] See opinions in Williston Walker, A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States, 6th ed. (New York, 1903), p. 262, and John M. Comstock, The Congregational Churches of Vermont and Their Ministry 1762-1942 (St. Johnsbury, Vermont, 1942), p. 8.

One of the earliest of the churches to split over the issue of the Half-Way Covenant and as a result of the Great Awakening was the church at Canterbury, Connecticut, which seems to have split in 1744. This split varied from many of them in that the ones who left were those who favored retaining the Half-Way Covenant. The remaining members of the congregation acted to purify their church. The church records, under date of August 2, 1745, declare "there being no half-members in Christ, this church covenants to admit none to own the covenant that will not come to full communion it being inconsistent with the covenant, nor will we admit any to baptism but such as are in judgment of charity true believers and their seed."[48]

The same grounds for separation is seen in the records of the Strict Congregational church of Preston, Connecticut, which was gathered March 17, 1747. The records give a long list of grievances and reasons for their separation from the parent church. Among these is the complaint that the church from which they separated "did not make saving conversion the necessary terms of communion: but admitted unbelievers to communion: also made half-members: baptized their children etc."[49] This complaint seems to indicate that this church practiced both the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism. It has proven too elusive to verify, but this statement from the Preston church records, and others of a similar nature, may indicate how Stoddardeanism operated in practice and why it and the Half-Way Covenant were so frequently equated by their contemporaries. The reference to admitting unbelievers to communion and making half-members suggests that either this church retained the Half-Way Covenant system but allowed those members to partake of communion, in which case their only disability would seem to have been the lack of power to vote in church matters, or they retained the Half-Way Covenant for those outside the covenant continuity who desired baptism for their children but could not qualify for even the relaxed Stoddardean terms of admission to church membership.

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[48] Records of the Congregational Church in Canterbury, Connecticut, 1711-1844 (Hartford, 1932), p. 11.

[49] Church records quoted in Blake, Separates, p. 60.

The role which Jonathan Edwards played in the Half-Way Covenant is not easy to define. His contributions to the Great Awakening certainly aided the foes of the Half-Way Covenant, and his writings were effectively used by the enemies of the system. It has been asserted[50] that Edwards did not oppose the Half-Way Covenant but only opposed the Stoddardean modification; however a fairly good case[51] has been presented to show that Edwards was fundamentally opposed to the system. Edwards' first argument against the Half-Way Covenant system appears as something of a side argument in his Humble Inquiry; however the reference seems to be sufficiently clear to show that Edwards was particularly opposed to the baptismal practice of the

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[50] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, p. 281; Henry M. Dexter, The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature (New York, 1880), p. 487, n. 73.

[51] George Leon Walker, "Jonathan Edwards and the Half-Way Covenant," The New Englander, CLXXXII (September, 1884), 601-614.

Half-Way Covenant. His argument was:

> If baptism were denied to all children, whose parents did not profess godliness, and in a judgment of rational charity appear real saints, it would tend to excite pious heads of families to more thorough care and pains in the religious education of their children . . . that they might be converted in youth, before they enter into the married state; and so if they have children the entail of the covenant be secured . . . Whereas the contrary practice has a natural tendency to quiet the minds of persons both in their own and their children's unregeneracy. Yea may it not be suspected that the way of baptizing the children of such as never make any proper profession of godliness, is an expedient originally invented for that very end, to give ease to ancestors with respect to their posterity, in times of general declension and degeneracy.[52]

The argument which Edwards used here against the Half-Way Covenant baptismal practice is a purely soteriological one. He opposed the system because it hindered, he thought, the salvation of the children baptized under it. There was no doctrinal objection voiced and no lamentation concerning its possible effect on the purity of the church.

Several years later when Edwards replied to Solomon Williams' defense of Stoddardeanism, he indicated that his opposition to the Half-Way Covenant system of baptism was to be assumed throughout his Humble Inquiry. He declared that "Mr. W. knows that thro' the whole of my book I suppose, this practice of baptizing the children of such as are here spoken of is wrong."[53] The clearest explanation of Edwards' position seems to be the following:

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[52] Jonathan Edwards, An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Compleat Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church (Boston, 1749), p. 130.

[53] Jonathan Edwards, Misrepresentations Corrected and Truth Vindicated (Boston, 1752), p. 112.

> The Baptism of Infants is the Seal of those Promises made to the seed of the righteous: And on these principles, some rational account may be given of infant Baptism; but there is no account can be given of it on Mr W-m's scheme, no warrant can be found for it in scripture; for they are promises, that are the warrant for privileges: But there are no promises of God's word to the seed of morally sincere Men, and only Half-christians.[54]

The statements which Edwards made on the subject of the Half-Way Covenant would seem to indicate that he basically opposed the system, but it can hardly be said that he actively opposed it. The tardiness of his pronouncements and their rather limited nature do not indicate the zeal of a crusader.

It is extremely difficult to find any evidence showing that Half-Way Covenant issues played any direct part in Edwards' controversy with his church at Northampton. The immediate cause of the difficulty was his attack on the practices of Stoddardeanism in the church, but back of this was a story of a build-up of personal antagonism that made his position virtually untenable if he were to give his opponents an issue. This he did when he repudiated the policies which his grandfather had instituted in the church and which Edwards had practiced for many years. Edwards later revealed that he had experienced misgivings on the subject "for many years past."[55] He openly revealed his sentiments in February of 1749,[56] and was soon embroiled in a controversy with his church on the subject of terms of admission to church membership and the Lord's Supper. Edwards was dismissed from his church in June of 1750 after a negative vote by a ministerial council whose membership was overwhelmingly made up of Arminians, anti-revivalists and advocates of lax admission policies. All of these were completely opposed to Edwards' views.[57]

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[54] Ibid., p. 151.

[55] Dwight, Works of Edwards, I, 313.

[56] Ibid., I, 305.

Edwards published his Humble Inquiry in 1749 at the height of the controversy, and the book is a statement and defense of his position. He stated that the main question of the book was:

> Whether, according to the rules of Christ, any ought to be admitted to the communion and privileges of members of the visible church of Christ in compleat standing, but such as are in profession and in the eye of the churches Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons.[58]

Edwards' words "compleat standing" could be construed as implying that he was not quarreling with the admission of such persons to partial standing. What Edwards did object to and very emphatically was "the practice of promiscuous admission-or that way of taking all into the church indifferently, as visible saints, who are not either ignorant or scandalous."[59] This statement might indicate that in practice Stoddardeanism had become more lax and inclusive than Stoddard had advocated in his statement of the theory of the practice.

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[57] Dwight , Works of Edwards, I, 336, 409.

[58] Edwards, Humble Inquiry, p. 1.

[59] Ibid., p. 135.

Apparently Edwards did not advocate or at least did not insist on a relation of conversion experience as a proper test for church membership. In the Preface to his Farewell Sermon he denies as a gross misrepresentation the following claim against him:

> That I [Edwards] insisted on persons being assured of their being in a state of salvation, in order to my admitting them into the church; that I required a particular relation of the method and order of a person's inward experience, and of the time and manner of his conversion, as the test of his fitness for Christian communion.[60]

This statement indicates that Edwards, although seeking to abolish Stoddardeanism and opposed to the Half-Way Covenant, did not seek a return to the long-established practice of relation of experience. His position seems to have been much the same as that which was adopted in the Congregational churches after the Half-Way Covenant was laid aside, and that was admission on the basis of a credible profession of faith.

Stoddard and Edwards both laid the ground work for future controversy and the eventual laying aside of the Half-Way Covenant. Stoddard's teaching made the Half-Way Covenant theoretically unnecessary, and the Edwardeans[61] who built on Edwards' theology made it seem undesirable.

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[60] Dwight , Works of Edwards, I, 628-629.

[61] The term Edwardean is used herein as a general term to designate the men and schools of theology which had their roots in the teachings of Jonathan Edwards.

CHAPTER XIII

DECLINE

The decline in the use of the Half-Way Covenant was a gradual process spread over a long time span. A number of forces can be cited as working against its use. In the broad sweep of theological development there was a shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric emphasis. This had the effect of tending to eliminate the need for the Half-Way Covenant which had been designed to protect the sanctity of the Lord's Table and to preserve the purity of the church at the same time that it allowed for a continuity; however this continuity was secondary to the concept of purity. As time went on there was a tendency to reverse the order of values. With the early Congregationalists the main emphasis, by far, was on glorifying God. With Stoddard and the Revivalistic movement there was a decided shift which placed the main emphasis on the salvation of man. Edwards seems to have tried to formulate a system which would attempt to stress both factors. His followers struck at the Half-Way Covenant system because they regarded it as inimical to both the glory of God and the salvation of men.

Parallel with Edwards and gaining momentum after him, there was a humanistic trend in theological development. This was manifested by the Deists, Unitarians, Universalists and many of the Arminians. They sought to liberalize the teachings and practices of the earlier Congregationalists by greatly stressing human values at the expense of Divine prerogatives. There was no place for a Half-Way Covenant in their systems which considered the Half-Way Covenant scheme degrading to human dignity.

Concurrent with these religious trends, and no doubt contributing to them, was a constantly increasing secularization of society. Many factors can be suggested as feeding this trend. There was the decline in religious zeal as Puritanism spent its force, and there was the constant influx of books and people with a secular orientation. The social disorganization accompanying the various wars, especially the American Revolutionary War, augmented the secular impulse. The trend toward a secularized society can be seen, for example, in the town of Chelmsford. In 1741 the church membership of the town was 195 out of a town population of 853. In 1820 the total church membership of the town, including Baptists, was 160 out of a town population of 1450.[1]

Following Edwards four schools of theology or at least parties seem to be evident in the Congregational fold or associated with it in varying degrees. These parties were the Arminians or liberals, the old line Congregationalists who are frequently referred to as the old line Calvinists, the Edwardeans or New Divinity men and the Revivalists who frequently tended toward Baptistic persuasion. The Arminians or liberals were largely indifferent to the Half-Way Covenant but opposed it in principle as antiquated. The old line Congregationalists adhered to the Half-Way Covenant and defended it. The Edwardeans and Revivalists sought to abolish it.

Jonathan Edwards appears to have been influential in setting in motion several forces in the Congregational churches which would eventually lead to the abandonment of the Half-Way Covenant. One line of influence was his part in the revival movement and the other was his attack on Stoddardeanism. The following statement summarizes his contribution:

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[1] Wilkes Allen, The History of Chelmsford, from Its Origin in 1653, to the Year 1820 (Haverhill, Massachusetts, 1820), p. 112.

> His discussion of the requisite qualifications for communion unquestionably had great influence in preparing the public mind for the rejection of the half-way scheme of church membership. The principles which he established were directly and effectively applied to the whole subject by such 'New Divinity' men as Hopkins and Bellamy and Spring, in their discussions with Hemmenway, Mather, Tappan and Dana. The Edwardian or Hopkinsian school of divines are manifestly entitled to a large share of the credit of driving out of the churches all the various forms of the Half-Way Covenant which had been current for nearly a century and a half.[2]

Edwards had launched his attack in 1749. His target was the Stoddardean practice of opening church membership and the communion privilege to all who had been born in the covenant relation and had not forfeited that right by scandalous conduct. The main instrument of his attack was his Humble Inquiry. This has been called "a reservoir out of which all subsequent writers have consciously or unconsciously derived very much of their argument"[3] against the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardeanism. The Humble Inquiry was answered by Solomon Williams in 1751 with his True State of the Question. Edwards replied to this in 1752 with his Misrepresentations Corrected, and then there was a considerable lull in the controversy until it was taken up by Joseph Bellamy, a follower of Edwards, in 1762.[4]

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[2] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts (Boston, 1865), p. 281.

[3] George Leon Walker, "Jonathan Edwards and the Half-Way Covenant," The New Englander, CLXXXII (September, 1884), p. 614.

Bellamy has been credited, by his biographer, with being "the first minister in the state who came out publicly against the half-way covenant."[5] The records of his Bethlehem, Connecticut, church tell us that "upon the publishing of Mr. Edwards' Book on the Sacrament (1750) [sic], this Half-Way Covenant practice was laid aside, as not warranted by the holy scriptures-there being no other scriptural owning of the covenant, but what implies a profession of Godliness."[6] This statement indicates that the Bethlehem church interpreted Edwards' book as an attack on the Half-Way Covenant as well as Stoddardeanism.

Bellamy published his Dialogue on the Christian Sacraments in 1762. It is anti-Stoddardean but has little concerning the Half-Way Covenant. From this time onward there was a steady flow of controversial works on the subject of Stoddardeanism and the Half-Way Covenant. Williston Walker's bibliography of the Half-Way Covenant lists forty-four writings on the subject. These begin with Edwards' Humble Inquiry in 1749 and extend through Timothy Dwight's sermon on the subject in 1823. Forty-one of these writings occurred in the period 1762-1798, and twenty-eight of these occurred in the period 1762-1774. During this latter period of intense activity the number of publications was almost evenly divided between the forces. There were thirteen writings by those opposed to the Half-Way Covenant and fifteen by its defenders. Those who attacked the Half-Way Covenant in the years 1762-1774 were Joseph Bellamy, Jacob Green, Israel Holley and Chandler Robbins. All of these men are considered Edwardean in their theology, and all of them are to be closely identified with Joseph Bellamy. The men who defended the Half-Way covenant were more diverse in their theological positions, but most of them were basically Stoddardean and some were Arminian. The men were William Hart, Ebenezer Devotion, Nathanael Taylor, George Beckwith, Andrew Bartholomew, Moses Mather, Charles Chauncy and John Cotton.

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[4] For the bibliography of the Half-Way Covenant controversy from Edwards onward see Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston, 1960), pp. 241-244.

[5] Tryon Edwards, "Memoir," in Joseph Bellamy, The Works of Joseph Bellamy, D. D. First Pastor of the Church in Bethlem, Connecticut with a Memoir of His Life and Character, 2 vols. (Boston, 1853), I, lvi.

[6] Church records quoted by William Cothren, History of Ancient Woodbury, Connecticut from the First Indian Deed in 1659 to 1871 . . . , 3 vols. (Waterbury, Connecticut, 1871), I, 244.

There does not appear to be anything fundamentally new in any of the arguments advanced by either side in the exchange. The basic issues in all of them are the matter of the continuity of the covenant relation and the terms of admission to church membership and baptism. There is much discussion concerning visible saints, the visible and invisible church, internal and external covenants, the covenant of grace and much intricate and obscure theological hairsplitting.[7]

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[7] The various positions, arguments and the men involved have been treated extensively by Peter Ymen De Jong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1945), pp. 154-203.

The basic argument of the Edwardeans seems to be that the Half-Way Covenant was unnecessary, undesirable and unscriptural. They regarded it as a half-way house constructed between the saved and the unsaved without any warrant. Their arguments were the same in many respects as those that had been earlier advanced by John Davenport and Charles Chauncy after the Synod of 1662, but they were not complicated by adherence to the practice of a public relation of conversion experience as were the arguments of the earlier men. The Edwardeans had apparently followed the lead of Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards and had quietly laid aside the practice of relations in their arguments. With this out of the way the requirement for admission to full church membership then became a matter of making a credible profession of saving faith. With this the individual could be admitted to full communion, and without it he was barred as a complete outsider. Whereas the arguments of Chauncy and Davenport against the Half-Way Covenant were blocked, in effect, in many cases by the insurmountable obstacle of the institution of relations with its insistence on a verifiable objective experience of conversion, the Edwardeans were not confronted with this obstacle. For this reason their chances of securing acceptance of their views was greatly enhanced. Their arguments were based on realistic grounds, and the main obstacle they had to overcome was the force of tradition and an established practice that had never been uniform nor universal and was being abused by lax practices. These lax practices could be easily pointed out and served as a starting point for attacking the whole Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardean complex.

Joseph Bellamy launched what proved to be the decisive attack on the Half-Way Covenant in January of 1769 with his The Half-Way Covenant: A Dialogue. The argument was in the form of a series of dialogues between a minister who rejected the Half-Way Covenant and a new parishioner who was accustomed to the practice and sought baptism for his latest child but was refused. The parishioner was very much surprised at this development, and objected that he thought the practice was universal. The minister assured him that it had never been universal in New England. The minister then inquired as to the parishioner's understanding of what was involved in owning the covenant. The following part of the dialogue expresses the parishioner's understanding and the minister's line of attack on the system:

> P. It was the common opinion that none ought to join in full communion, and come to the Lord's table, but those that were godly, that had on a wedding garment, lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink damnation to themselves. But it was thought that graceless persons might own the covenant, and have their children baptized; and this was my opinion, and I acted on these principles.
>
> M. Yes, sir, and I suppose the generality of people in the country that own the covenant, in these times, act on these principles. But it was not so from the beginning. The synod in 1662, who first brought in the practice, were not in this scheme.[8]

One of the most telling arguments that had been used against the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant in the first place was that it was a departure from first principles and established practices. The Edwardeans now used the same type of argument against its continuation. Bellamy quoted at length from the writings of Increase Mather to show how he insisted on the presence of real faith as the grounds for baptism. Bellamy's puzzled parishioner and the minister then arrived at this conclusion:

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[8] Bellamy, Works, II, 668-669.

> P. But if this was in fact the case, I cannot conceive what room there was for the half-way covenant; for such persons might consistently profess to comply with the whole covenant, and not stop half way in practice, but come up to all ordinances.
>
> M. You are right in this observation. Persons so qualified, who have been brought up under the light of the gospel from their infancy, by pious parents and godly ministers, and now adult, and become godly themselves, professing and practicing accordingly, are, in a judgment of rational charity, as fit for the Lord's table, as to offer their children in baptism.[9]

The significant omission from the minister's requirements was the relation of experience. "Professing and practicing" was the standard stressed. This eliminated the great complicating factor of the earlier attacks on the Half-Way Covenant.

Mr. Bellamy's parishioner then turned the subject to Stoddard and claimed that his scheme favored the Half-Way Covenant. Bellamy denied this:

> M. This is a mistake. Mr. Stoddard, of Northampton, never practiced the half way; that is, he never admitted any to have baptism for their children but those who were in full communion; and he expressly declares, that those who have been baptized in infancy, and owned their covenant, are obliged in duty to come to the Lord's table. . . . There was no room for any half-way covenant or half-way practice, on his scheme.[10]

The parishioner's response to this was: "It seems as if the half-way covenant and the half-way practice could not be made consistent on any scheme."[11] The minister agreed with this conclusion and then asserted:

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[9] Ibid., II, 670.

[10] Ibid., II, 671.

[11] Ibid., II, 671.

> If the covenant owned is the covenant of grace, and if the parent acts understandingly and honestly in the affair, he is a good man, he has a right before God to baptism for his children, and an equal right to the Lord's supper . . . . But if the covenant owned is not the covenant of grace, those who have owned it have, in the sight of God, no right to either of those ordinances, which are seals of that covenant, and of no other.[12]

Bellamy's arguments sought to completely discredit the Half-Way Covenant, and his followers followed the same lines of attack that he set forth.

The maximum literary activity on the subject was in the years 1769-1770 when there were seventeen publications on the Half-Way Covenant subject. Moses Mather sought to bolster the sagging cause of the Half-Way Covenant system in 1769 by re-introducing the argument of an external and an internal covenant. He asserted that "persons in an unregenerate state may be capable subjects of being included in this external covenant, and thereby become the real members of the visible church of Christ."[13] This concept of an external covenant was usually called a graceless covenant by the Edwardeans and with very telling effect. From this point on the advocates of the Half-Way Covenant were more and more on the defensive. Williston Walker dates the decline of the Half-Way Covenant from the year 1769,[14] and this decline was largely brought about by the relentless attack of the Edwardeans.

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[12] Ibid., II, 671-672.

[13] Moses Mather, The Visible Church in Covenant with God (New York, 1759 [error for 1769, corrected in errata]), p. 4.

[14] Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, Boston, 1960), p. 278, n. 1.

Agitation for removal of the Half-Way Covenant in the Plymouth church caused a severe internal quarrel in the years 1770-1772. The pastor, Chandler Robbins, a pupil of Bellamy, asked for a discontinuance of the practice which had been instituted in 1731 by his predecessor, Nathaniel Leonard. Robbins' suggestion was vigorously opposed by an influential member of his church. This member was John Cotton, a grandson of New England's famous theologian of the same name, a former minister and a strong advocate of the Half-Way Covenant system After many bitter exchanges and numerous pamphlets, Cotton proposed that the issue in the Plymouth church be settled by having neighboring ministers baptize the infants that Robbins considered ineligible for baptism. This was to be done during pulpit exchanges. This policy was never officially adopted but appears to have been practiced unofficially for some time after the Half-Way Covenant was laid aside in the Plymouth church.[15]

The cause of Unitarianism may have been indirectly advanced in the Plymouth church because of the abandonment of the Half-Way Covenant practice. There does not seem to be any evidence indicating a direct causal connection, but there is evidence that might indicate that persons who were denied Half-Way Covenant baptism for their children may have sought recourse to the more inclusive Unitarianism. There was considerable agitation in the Plymouth church in 1794, and the church records contain the following memorandum on the subject which clearly indicates Half-Way Covenant agitation:

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[15] For the details of the controversy see Plymouth Church Records, 2 vols. (New York, 1920), I, xxxvi-xxxix, 334-345.

> The precinct, at a meeting, having chosen a committee of seven (through the influence and desire of a number of men who have, of late, talked of a separation and building another meeting house) to confer with a committee of this church and their pastor, on certain propositions made by a number of dissatisfied individuals, relative to the 'baptizing the children of such as have been themselves baptized and not immoral and professing a belief of the Christian religion'-with 2 or 3 other matters, of lesser importance, as they acknowledged.[16]

The records also note that "none of the gentlemen of the precinct committee desired or wished to have the ancient method of owning the covenant revived,"[17] but at the same time they desired the church to adopt a confession of faith which was Unitarian. The Plymouth church objected to this and insisted on including in the confession "the great and glorious scriptural doctrine of the divinity or true and proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ."[18] The skein of events in this controversy is too tangled to unravel with any assurance of correctness, but it is evident that the agitation in the Plymouth church involved the Half-Way Covenant to a certain extent.

The abolition of the Half-Way Covenant in many churches seems to have been preceded by either an official or an unofficial abandonment of the requirement of relations. This was the cause of the necessity of the Half-Way Covenant in the first place, and as it was laid aside there would not seem to be any need for the Half-Way Covenant; however in many churches the practice of the Half-Way Covenant seems to have continued long after the seeming need for it. This may indicate that in many churches the requirement for admission to full communion was still kept high even after the relations requirement was set aside. It may also indicate that many persons feared to partake of the communion even though the church may have deemed them worthy.

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[16] Ibid., I, 383.

[17] Ibid., I, 384.

[18] Ibid., I, 384.

The course of the Half-Way Covenant system in the First Church of Boston gives an illustration of the continuance of the system after the need for it was largely removed. The Half-Way Covenant was formally adopted in 1731 for the children of the church, and in 1736 the provisions of the Half-Way Covenant were made available to those who had not been admitted in their minority, that is, to adults who were not considered children of the church.[19] In 1756 the relation of experience was abolished as a requisite for full communion by the following motion which was adopted by church vote:

> That whereas sundry persons, desirous of joining with the church in full communion, have a scruple upon their minds about making a relation as usual, such might without doing it be admitted, if judged otherwise qualified for admission.[20]

In 1786 the church adopted a "Declaration of Faith Subscribed by the Members of the First Church of Christ in Boston," and along with this they adopted a series of five resolves relative to admission to membership. All of these were designed to make it easier to join the church. The third resolve was:

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[19] The Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868, ed. Richard D. Pierce, 3 vols. in Collections of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, vols. 39-41 (Boston, 1961), I, 172-173.

[20] Ibid., I, 213.

> Voted unanimously that all who believe in Jesus Christ; profess this belief; and sustain a good moral character, have a right to commune at the Lord's Table: it appearing from sacred authority, that nothing more was required of the primitive candidates for communion.[21]

The fifth resolve made the following provision for those who, in effect, wanted to maintain only a Half-Way membership:

> When any person, qualified, in a judgment of charity to commune with us, but discouraged by scruples of his own mind, shall offer a child for baptism, voted unanimously, that nothing further be required, than subscription to our common declaration of faith, assenting however, to this additional article, that he will educate his child in the faith and practice of that religion to which he has solemnly set his hand.[22]

In keeping with this resolve the records carry a "Declaration of Faith Subscribed by those who request a baptism for their children." The wording is exactly the same as the statement for those joining in full communion except for the inclusion of the clause about promising to educate the child in the faith. The last entry under this heading occurs under November 28, 1834, and at a church meeting of July 6, 1828, "it was unanimously voted, that the baptismal covenant of this church, commonly called the half-way covenant, be hereafter dispensed with."[23] This was the official end of the Half-Way Covenant in the Boston First Church.

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[21] Ibid., II, 473.

[22] Ibid., II, 473.

In many churches there was a trend toward modifying the practice of relations long before the practice was completely abandoned. This was illustrated in the Plymouth church where it was voted in 1705 that the relation of experience could be written out.[24] This policy was continued until 1823 when it was abolished.[25]

Dating the time of the actual abandonment of Half-Way Covenant practices in many churches is uncertain because in a great many cases the practice was allowed to fall into disuse long before it was officially ended. Many times it was tacitly abandoned without any official action or any accompanying discussion. In some churches the Half-Way Covenant seems to have been eased out of the picture by the pastor having the persons who owned the covenant for baptismal purposes doing it privately to him instead of publicly before the church. Gradually even this practice was abandoned.[26]

This study has been able to ascertain fairly definite terminal dates for the Half-Way Covenant in approximately twenty-eight churches in the period of 1760-1834, and twenty-two of these occurred in the period 1789-1834. This period roughly corresponds to the period of greatest defection from Congregationalism to Unitarianism, but there does not seem to be any readily discernible causal connection between the two developments. Congregational writers have not been able to agree as to whether the Half-Way Covenant was a contributing cause of any importance to the rise of Unitarianism, but there does not seem to be much indication that the Half-Way Covenant can be considered responsible for the rise of Unitarianism.[27]

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[23] Ibid., II, 482.

[24] Plymouth Church Records, I, 201.

[25] Ibid., II, 575.

[26] See discussion on this matter in Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 279.

The Woodbury, Connecticut, church abandoned the Half-Way Covenant in 1760, and the church records give an unusually detailed statement of reasons for giving it up. These reasons appear to be ones that were quite frequently used in arguments for abandonment of the Half-Way Covenant:

> At a meeting of the members of the church at the meeting house the following things were voted (viz) 1st. that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are Seals of the Covenant of Grace. 2nd. that the Covenant of Grace is but one Covenant. 3rd. that whosoever makes a credible profession that he believes and embraces the Covenant of Grace and appears to walk accordingly has a right to Sealing ordinances. 4th. that he that has a right to Sealing ordinances for himself has also a right to Baptism for his children. 5th. that the Lord's Supper is not more holy than Baptism. It was likewise voted that those persons that had owned the Covenant and yet had absented themselves from the Lord's Supper, had owned a Covenant of Grace and upon their manifesting

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[27] This is the opinion of Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, pp. 282, 284. On the other hand Henry M. Dexter, "Two Hundred Years Ago, in New England," The Congregational Quarterly, IV (July, 1862), p. 291, asserts that John Wilson, Richard Mather, John Allin and Jonathan Mitchell and the rest of the majority of the Synod of 1662 were "the first and chiefest-though most unwitting-primogenitors" of Unitarianism and "the year 1662 is the true birth-date of Unitarianism." William Eleazar Barton, Congregational Creeds and Covenants (Chicago, 1917), p. 212, maintains that it was "not the laxness of the covenants which produced Unitarianism, but the hyper-Calvinism of the preaching of that period."

> that they mean to be understood as having owned the Covenant of Grace shall be looked upon as members in complete standing and admitted to the Seals of the Covenant.[28]

In 1779 the Second Church of Salisbury, Massachusetts, voted to abolish the Half-Way Covenant practice, but at the same time they voted "that those persons who have heretofore been thus indulged, be still indulged if they desire it."[29] This provision allowed a transitional period which was probably designed to smooth the path of abandonment and avoid church controversy. The Canton Center, Connecticut, church abolished their Half-Way Covenant as a result of a revival in the church.[30] The Half-Way Covenant was abolished in the First Church of New Haven in 1789,[31] and in the same year the following entry occurs in the records of First Church in Haverhill, Massachusetts:

> Whereas it has been customary for persons in order to obtain baptism for their children to make a public profession of faith called 'owning the Covenant,' and as this condition may hinder some persons (though otherwise qualified) from complying with the institution; voted that it be no longer required, but the children of all baptized persons may be admitted to this holy ordinance unless they (the parents) have forfeited this privilege by scandalous immorality.[32]

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[28] "Woodbury Church Records," p. 103, from a transcription by the Colonial Dames Society.

[29] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 373.

[30] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Connecticut, (New Haven, 1861), p. 359.

[31] Leonard Bacon, Thirteen Historical Discourses on the Completion of 200 Years from the Beginning of the First Church in New-Haven, p. 393.

[32] Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of Essex, County, Massachusetts, p. 279.

The Windsor, Connecticut, church was one of the first to adopt the Half-Way Covenant, although not continuously practiced, and one of the last to abandon it, giving it up in 1822. The Ipswich church quietly laid the Half-Way Covenant aside in 1828.[33]

For all practical purposes 1834 appears to be the terminal date for the Half-Way Covenant. In this year the Marlborough, Massachusetts, church officially abandoned the Covenant,[34] and this seems to be the last official action taken by any church on the subject. This study has not been able to uncover any references to the Half-Way Covenant in the churches beyond this date although it may very well have continued in some churches after this time. Most of the orthodox Congregational churches that laid aside the Half-Way Covenant appear to have accomplished this by setting up a Confession of faith as the requirement for church membership and with it the baptism of infants. By this action they had not abandoned their theory of covenant continuity, or they would not have continued the practice of infant baptism because it has to be grounded either on a theory of continuity or a theory of efficacy in the baptismal rite. What they had abandoned was religious experience as a test for church membership and a means of preserving the ideal of a pure church. In this action they reverted to the practice of the Plymouth and Salem churches which had brought the Congregational ideal to America in the first place but had demanded only a godly life and a sincere profession of faith as a requirement for church membership.

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[33] Ibid., p. 335. Dates of abandonment by other churches are: Greenwich, Conn., between 1786-1818; Dedham, Mass., 1793; Hebron, Conn., 1793; Chelmsford, Mass., 1803; South Windsor, Conn., 1808; Canterbury, Conn., 1815; Huntington (Formerly Ripton), Conn., 1817; Charlestown, Mass., 1828.

[34] George Leon Walker, "Jonathan Edwards and the Half-Way Covenant," The New Englander, CLXXXII (September, 1884), 614.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

The Half-Way Covenant was an attempt to maintain two classes of members within the Congregational churches of New England. The purpose was to preserve the purity of the church by limiting access to the Lord's Supper and the privilege of voting in church affairs to the proven elect and at the same time to provide for the continuity of the church by allowing a limited class of membership which conveyed the right to have children baptized. The Half-Way Covenant system was formulated in an age when the idea of covenant and contract was one of the great areas of thought, and it was one of the controlling principles of Puritanism. The idea of the Half-Way Covenant was probably the greatest original contribution which American Puritanism made to the general body of covenant thinking.[1] From the first agitation on the subject in 1634 until the last recorded official action on the matter in 1834 the Half-Way Covenant idea was a theme which ran through much of the religious and intellectual life of New England. In this respect it may be said to have absorbed much of the intellectual energy of New England. This was particularly true during the considerable periods when the Half-Way Covenant was the subject of great agitation and literary effort.

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[1] This is the opinion of Peter Ymen De Jong in The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 1620-1847 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1945), p. 196.

New England Covenant theology was a fusion of three lines of covenant thinking. There was the principle of the theological covenant which involved a covenant or promise by God to perform certain things for the individual if he met the conditions. Once consummated this covenant was largely national and organic because it included the promise of continuity of the covenant relation from generation to generation by natural descent. Then there was the contract-covenant principle by means of which the individual bound himself to God in order to secure God's blessing. This was essentially an individualistic covenant. Last of all there was the church covenant idea which involved the individuals binding themselves together for the enjoyment of the privileges of the other two covenant principles.

The Half-Way Covenant was the culmination of a long process of covenant development, and certain suggestions can be made as to the significant lines of development. In the Old Testament the ideal was that of a theocratic state formed by the covenant relationship between God and Israel. This may be considered as a theological covenant with national force. In the New Testament the covenant concept seems to have been that of an implied covenant between God and the individual Christian. In the sub-Apostolic age, as seen in Justin Martyr for example, the individual covenant has become an explicit organizational one which bound the individual both to God and his fellows. With the rise of the concept of a universal institutional church faith was linked to a system of efficacious sacraments, and the stress on efficacious sacraments seems to have reduced the importance of the implied and explicit voluntaristic covenants. With the

Reformers the grounds of individual relationship were largely changed from the efficacious sacraments to an act of faith as the controlling principle. The emphasis was only shifted, and the idea of efficacious sacraments was modified but not destroyed. This is seen in the continuing emphasis on the means of grace and the great stress on communion and baptism which continued in the Protestant churches. With Tyndale there was a great stress on the contract nature of relations between God and the individual soul. The Frankfort exiles developed a full church covenant system but without any signs of the contract-covenant principle and only a passive adherence to the theological covenant. Robert Browne and his successors carried on the church covenant idea as an organizing principle and linked it to the Covenant theology but without any particular stress on it. This was the same type of covenant concept that the Plymouth Pilgrims and the Salem Puritans seem to have brought with them. Then with the coming of the great Puritan influx and such leaders as John Cotton and Thomas Hooker all of the components were fused into a grand system. To the basic theological covenant and theocratic ideal of Israel were added both the contract-covenant principle and the church covenant one. In a theocratic state the ideal is for all of the inhabitants to be in the same religious sytem, but lacking this at least a majority must be included if the system is to succeed according to its principles. The Half-Way Covenant was an expedient designed by the New England theologians to maintain their system without sacrificing their ideal of a pure church and at the same time to provide for the continuity of the system.

The New England theocratic ideal with its concept of a monistic religious system was faced with a crucial problem when its theory of covenant continuity collided head-on with its ideal of a pure church and the test established to maintain that ideal. Three general alternatives can be suggested as lines of action that might have been followed. One would have been to abandon the theocratic ideal and allow religious pluralism. This would have meant sacrificing one of the main reasons for the New England venture and so was unthinkable. Another alternative would have been to abandon the ideal of the pure church or at least the test adopted to maintain the pure church, but such an expedient would have been considered as untenable as the idea of giving up the theocratic ideal. A third alternative was to modify the theory of continuity by providing what it was hoped would be only a temporary station in the quest of the individual for full status. The Half-Way Covenant seems to have been the only possible practical solution to the problem posed by the apparently irreconcilable principles of purity and continuity. Something had to give ground, and it was the theory of complete continuity which was sacrificed by the Synod of 1662. Jonathan Mitchell's goal of attaining a middle of the road position was a happy temporary position, but like all such moderate positions it pleased neither extreme. As a result it was constantly open to attack from both those who thought the Half-Way Covenant system did not go far enough toward opening the doors of church membership and baptism and those who thought it was letting down the bars too far. It is also true that although the middle position may be open to attack from both extremes it may be the most defensible position. This seems to have been true of the Half-Way Covenant and its long span of life in spite of many efforts against it.

After the Half-Way Covenant system had been in practice for many years certain abuses crept in and inroads were made in its defensive position as theological and social climates changed and produced modifications in the practice. Solomon Stoddard can be said to have sacrificed the ideal of a pure church in favor of the continuity of the church and his idea of salvation as the controlling principle of theology. By opening the Lord's Supper to all who could claim a covenant position by lineal descent he repudiated the doctrine of the pure church and magnified the theory of continuity of Covenant theology. Many of those who remained loyal to the Half-Way Covenant system appear to have gradually lowered the standards for admission to the Half-Way Covenant membership to the point where it was little more than a mere formality for obtaining baptism for an infant. This appears to have been done primarily as an accommodation to social pressures rather than as a plan to lessen the purity of the church. There is very little, if any, evidence to show that the requirements for full communion were lowered by the great majority of the true Half-Way Covenant theologians. The lowering was done by those who put in practice the Stoddardean modification rather than by the Half-Way Covenant adherents.

The practice of the Stoddardeans and the tendency of the Half-Way Covenant pastors to admit for infant baptism on a very lax standard produced an image of a very low estate of church purity. The spirit of Revivalism militated against this, and the Edwardean theologians gave the attack intellectual respectability and forceful leadership. The Edwardeans were able to attack successfully both Stoddardeanism and the Half-Way Covenant system because they also took a middle ground approach which actually modified both the ideal of the pure church and the theory of continuity. The Edwardeans sought to re-establish the ideal of the pure church but on the basis of a much more realistic test than the earlier advocates of the pure church had devised. The Edwardeans were willing to accept a credible profession of faith rather than an objective religious experience as their standard, but at the same time they modified the theory of continuity of both the Stoddardeans and the Half-Way Covenant theologians by insisting on this credible profession of faith as the only basis for admission to the church and infant baptism. A conversion experience was unquestionably stressed and encouraged by the Edwardean theologians, but a credible profession of faith was considered to be adequate proof that it had taken place. The Edwardeans were also willing to recognize that conversion could have taken place in the individual without an identifiable experience, and this too could be verified by a convincing profession of faith.

The Edwardean system was much more workable and realistic than the one which had given rise to the Half-Way Covenant, and when it was coupled with Revivalism it had a strong appeal to the evangelical parties within the churches and was able to command their allegiance. At the same time that this was transpiring the rising liberal theology was commanding the allegiance of the liberal minded parties of the churches. The result was that the Half-Way Covenant was left without a house to occupy.

Throughout much of its career the Half-Way Covenant was dedicated to the ideal of maintaining the pure church. It never was the intention of its backers to lower the purity of the church, but rather this was a practical device to maintain that purity. As a result of this controlling philosophy the Half-Way Covenant members seemingly always occupied an inferior status in the churches. They were definitely regarded as second-class church members and at best slackers in their Christian duty.

The Half-Way Covenant had a very practical function in the Congregational system. Persons who lacked the requisite experience of conversion or who feared to partake of the Lord's Supper could still keep themselves related to the church and thus near to the esteemed means of grace; likewise their children could be baptized and kept under the watch care of the church and in a position to receive the requisite nourishment for their soul's welfare. In this respect the Half-Way Covenant seems to reflect a rather typical New England approach of practical adaptation and adherence to moderate principles.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

"EDWARD HALL'S CONFESSION" c. 1640 [1]

"Edward Hall's Confession. The first means of his good was Mr. Glover's ministry, whereby he saw his misery from Jer. 7, the temple of the Lord, and that he was without Christ. But he went from thence to another place, under the sense of an undone condition; but in that place he was deprived of the ordinances of God, and hence the Scripture came oft to mind, what if a man win the world, and lose his soul? Hence he desired to come to that place again; But the minister was gone. But Mr. Jenner came, and by him he saw more evil in himself; but Mr. S. came, and then the Lord did more clearly manifest himself to him from John 3, concerning the new birth. And here he saw more of his misery, and that he had followed examples and duties, and made them his Christ, and lived without Christ. Hereby the Lord let him see he was Christless, and built upon false foundations, and by this text he saw himself no new creature, but only a mended man. Now when the Lord did humble him under this, he saw the want of Christ, and that without him he must perish. And afterwards John 5. 40 was opened, you will not come to me to have life; and hence he saw how freely Christ was offered, and hereby the Lord did stay and comfort his spirit, and so was stirred up with more vehemency to seek Christ. And then that promise was opened, the Son of man came to seek that which was lost; and he did not know but the

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[1] From Lucius R. Paige, History of Cambridge, Massachusetts 1630-1877 with a Genealogical Register (Boston, 1877), pp. 252-253.

Lord might seek him. And out of that text, 1 Pet. 2. 8, that unto you that believe he is precious; and here he saw his unbelief in cleaving to Christ by fits and starts. And since the Lord brought him to this place, he found his worldliness; and this bred many fears whether ever any work of Christ in him was in truth, and that he was one that might fall short of Christ, and that he was humbled; but his heart was not deep enough, and hence he was put to more search whether ever he was humbled. Yet the Lord made it more clear from Ephraim's condition, Jer. 31. 18, that the Lord had made him loathe himself, and this made him loathe him self ; and here he hath found more enmity of his heart against the Lord than ever before. But hearing the Lord was willing to take away his enmity, he, by Rev. 22. 14 was brought nearer to the Lord."

APPENDIX B

"Relation of Bethiah Walley when she was admitted to the Third church in 1744. She was then 20 years old and died 4 years later."[1]

"I desire to be humbly thankful, that God has favored me beyond such multitudes of my fellow creatures, by ordering my birth in a land, where the joyful sound of the gospel is heard, where I have been early baptized and religiously educated; but I would be deeply humbled, that I have forgotten my covenant-obligations, that I have been so often deaf to the calls of God in his word and Providences, and that I have so often resisted the strivings of his Holy Spirit. I hope God has discovered to me my sinful miserable condition by nature and by practice, and convinced me that eternal punishment is my just desert; But blessed be his holy name, that he has found out a way for the recovery of lost sinners, even by sending his son Jesus Christ to save them. I hope God has enabled me by faith to fly to this only saviour and to trust in his perfect righteousness alone for justification and salvation, and I hope I am willing that Christ should teach and rule me, as well as save me (And I hope that looking to Jesus, I mourn for my sins, and am willing to turn from them to God by Jesus Christ).

I have had desires for some time to come to the Lord's Table, but have been kept back by fears of coming unworthily; but the ill state of health in which I have lately been, I hope has been a means of quickening me in this matter; and many places of Scripture have encouraged me, particularly that passage in 14 Luk. 21. Bring in hither the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind. I hope it is from some degree of love of Christ, that I now desire to obey his dying command, do this in remembrance of me; and in so doing I desire to depend on him alone both for strength and righteousness.

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[1] From Hamilton A. Hill, History of the Old South Church Boston, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1890), I, 309.

I humbly offer myself to your communion, asking your prayers for me, that I may bring forth much of that fruit, whereby God may be glorified, and so adorn this my Profession."

APPENDIX C

COVENANT OF THE SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS CHURCH[1]

"Gather my Saints together unto me that have made a Covenant with me by sacrifyce. Psa. 50 : 5 :

We whose names are here under written, members of the present Church of Christ in Salem, having found by sad experience how dangerous it is to sitt loose to the Covenant wee make with our God: and how apt wee are to wander into by pathes, even to the looseing of our first aimes in entring into Church fellowship: Doe therefore solemnly in the presence of the Eternall God, both for our own comforts, and those which shall or maye be joyned unto us, renewe that Church Covenant we find this Church bound unto at theire first beginning, viz: That *We Covenant with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd our selves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth.* And doe more explicitely in the name and feare of God, profess and protest to walke as followeth through the power and grace of our Lord Jesus.

1 first wee avowe the Lord to be our God, and our selves his people in the truth and simplicitie of our spirits.

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[1] From Daniel Appleton White, *New England Congregationalism in Its Origin and Purity Illustrated by the Foundation and Early Records of the First Church in Salem and Various Discussions Pertaining to the Subject* (Salem, 1861), pp. 13-14. See also pp. 62-66 for a discussion of this covenant. The text is also given in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston, 1960), pp. 116-118. In the format used in this appendix the text of the original covenent of 1629 has been indicated by italics, and the closing anti-Quaker clause of 1660 has been shown by means of capital letters. The rest of the covenant is that which Hugh Peter installed in 1636.

2 Wee give our selves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the word of his grace, fore the teaching, ruleing and sanctifyeing of us in matters of worship, and Conversation, resolveing to cleave to him alone for life and glorie; and oppose all contrarie wayes, cannons and constitutions of men in his worship.

3 Wee promise to walke with our brethren and sisters in this Congregation with all watchfullness and tendernes, avoyding all jelousies, suspitions, backbyteings, censurings, provoakings, secrete risings of spirite against them; but in all offences to follow the rule of the Lord Jesus, and to beare and forbeare, give and forgive as he hath taught us.

4 In publick or in private, we will willingly doe nothing to the ofence of the Church but will be willing to take advise for our selves and ours as ocasion shalbe presented.

5 Wee will not in the Congregation be forward eyther to shew oure owne gifts or parts in speaking or scrupling, or there discover the fayling of oure brethren or sisters butt attend an orderly cale there unto; knowing how much the Lord may be dishonoured, and his Gospell in the profession of it, sleighted, by our distempers, and weaknesses in publyck.

6 Wee bynd ourselves to studdy the advancement of the Gospell in all truth and peace, both in regard of those that are within, or without, noe way sleighting our sister Churches, but useing theire Counsell as need shalbe: nor laying a stumbling block before any, noe not the Indians, whose good we desire to promote, and soe to converse, as we may avoyd the verrye appearance of evill.

7 Wee hearbye promise to carrye our selves in all lawfull obedience, to those that are over us, in Church or Commonweale, knowing how well pleasing it will be to the Lord, that they should have incouragement in theire places, by our not greiveing theyre spirites through our Irregularities.

8 Wee resolve to approve our selves to the Lord in our perticular calings, shunning ydleness as the bane of any state, nor will wee deale hardly, or oppressingly with any, wherein we are the Lord's stewards:

9 alsoe promyseing to our best abilitie to teach our children and servants, the knowledge of God and his will, that they may serve him also; and all this, not by any strength of our owne, but by the Lord Christ, whose bloud we desire may sprinckle this our Covenant made in his name.

THIS COVENANT WAS RENEWED BY THE CHURCH ON A SOLLEMNE DAY OF HUMILIATION 6 OF 1 MONETH 1660. WHEN ALSO CONSIDERING THE POWER OF TEMPTATION AMONGST US BY REASON OF YE QUAKERS DOCTRINE TO THE LEAVENING OF SOME IN THE PLACE WHERE WE ARE AND ENDANGERING OF OTHERS, DOE SEE CAUSE TOREMEMBER THE ADMONITION OF OUR SAVIOUR CHRIST TO HIS DISCIPLES MATH. 16. TAKE HEED AND BEWARE OF YE LEAVEN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES AND DOE JUDGE SO FARRE AS WE UNDERSTAND IT YT YE QUAKERS DOCTRINE IS AS BAD OR WORSE THAN THAT OF YE PHARISEES; THEREFORE WE DOE COVENNANT BY THE HELP OF JESUS CHRIST TO TAKE HEED AND BEWARE OF THE LEAVEN OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE QUAKERS."

APPENDIX D

WILLIAM PITKIN PETITION OF 1664[1]

"The humble address and petition of sundry persons of and belonging to the same Corporation, sheweth,

That whereas we whose names are subscribed, being Professors of the Protestant Christian Religion, members of the Church of England, and subjects to our Sovereign Lord Charles the Second, by God's grace, King of England, etc., and under those sacred ties mentioned and maintained in our covenant, sealed with our baptism, having seriously pondered our past and present want of those ordinances, which to us and our children, as members of Christ's visible church, ought to be administered. Which we apprehend to be to the dishonor of God, and the obstruction of our own and our children's good (contrary to the pious will of our Lord the King, his main purpose in settling these plantations, as by the Charter and His Majesty's letter to the Bay, June 26, 1662, and thereways is most evidently manifested) to our great grief, the sense of our duty towards God, the relation we stand in to our mother the Church, our grateful acceptation of His Majesty's Royal favor, the edification of our own and our children's souls, and many other good Christian and profitable ends (as also at a late session of this honored assembly having received a favorable encouragement from the worshipful Deputy Governor) hereunto moving us, we are bold by his own address to declare our aggreviance and petition for a redress of the same.

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[1] From Henry R. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut, Including East Windsor, South Windsor, and Ellington . . . . (New York, 1859), pp. 167-168.

Our aggreviance is, that we and ours, are not under the due care of an orthodox ministry, that will in a due manner administer to us those ordinances, that we stand capable of, as the baptising of our children, our being admitted (as we according to Christ's order may be found meet) to the Lord's Table, and a careful watch over us in our way, and suitable dealing with us as we do well or ill, with all whatsoever benefits and advantages, belong to us as members of Christ's visible church, which ought to be dispensed by the officers of the same, of which being destitute, we humbly request, that this Honored Court would take into serious consideration our present state in this respect, that we are thus as sheep scattered, having no shepherd, and compare it with what we conceive you can not but know, both God and our King would have it different from what it now is, and take some speedy and effectual course for redress therein, and put us in a full and free capability of enjoying those forementioned advantages, which to us as members of Christ's visible church do of right belong, by establishing some wholesome law in this Corporation, by virtue whereof, we may both claim and receive of such officers, as are or shall be by law set over us in the church or churches, where we have our abode or residence, these forementioned privileges and advantages.

Furthermore we humbly request, that for the future, no law in this corporation may be of any force to make us pay or contribute the maintenance of any minister or officer of the church that will neglect or refuse to baptise our children & to take care of us, as of such members of the church, as are under his or their charge or care.

This, in hopes that your careful and speedy consideration and issue hereof, will be answerable to the weight of the matter, and our necessities, and that matters of less moment may be omitted till this be issued. We wait for a good answer, and for this Honored Court we shall ever pray, etc."

[Signed by] WILLIAM PITKIN [Hartford],
Oct. 17, 1664.
MICHAEL HUMPHREY [Windsor],
JOHN STEDMAN [Hartford],
JAMES ENO [Windsor],
ROBERT REEVE,
JOHN MOSES [Windsor],
JONAS WESTOVER [Windsor].

VITA

Lewis Milton Robinson was born at Viola, Minnesota, on February 24, 1915. He attended various schools and was graduated from the Dixon Public High School, Dixon, Illinois, in 1933. He followed several lines of employment and served with the U. S. Navy in World War II. In 1951 he received the B. A. degree from Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California, and in 1955 he received the Th. M. from the Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. In 1956 he received the A. M. in history from the University of Illinois, and in 1963 he received the Ph. D. in history from the same school.